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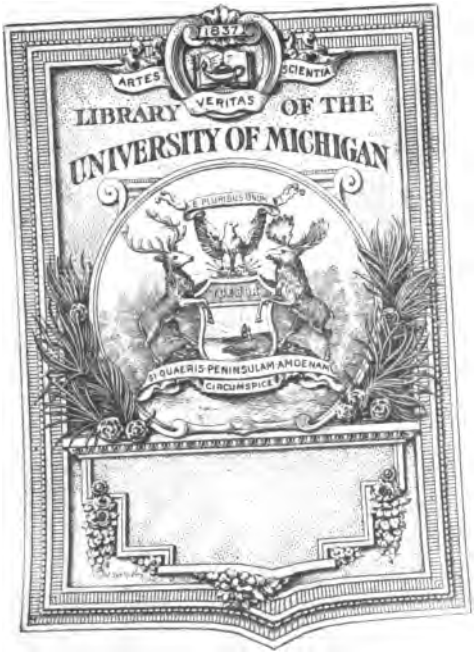
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WILD EELIN. BY WILLIAM BLACK.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

WILD EELIN

HER ESCAPADES, ADVENTURES, AND BITTER SORROWS

BY

WILLIAM BLACK,

AUTHOR OF

"A DAUGHTER OF HETH," "MACLEOD OF DARE," "BRISEIS,"

ETC. ETC.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.—VOL. II.

LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1898.

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WILD EELIN.

CHAPTER I.

"HERE ALL EYES GAZE ON US."

FROM earliest dawn the skirl of the pipes had been heard, along the country roads or through the outskirts of the town; as the day declared itself, an unusual activity everywhere prevailed; the dull grey thoroughfares had touches of colour here and there, in the various uniforms of regulars and volunteers; young fellows, in all the bravery of kilt and jacket and sporran, or in the quieter costume of knicker-bockers and deerstalking cap, lounged about the porticoes of the hotels, thinking less of their morning cigarette than of the hoped-for favours at the dance that night; house-parties came driving in in waggonettes; and already stragglers were making away for the grounds in which the Athletic Sports and Competitions were to be held. It was a gala day for Invernish; and the heavens were propitious; a silver-clear sky showered floods of diamonds on the swinging and fretted current of the river; there was just enough wind to stir the bannerets hanging from the tall poles; and

the sunlight was gradually and surely increasiug in strength until even the slopes of the Black Isle, afar on the horizon, began to show a dusky yellow through the dim sea-mists.

And fain, fain would Eelin Macdonald have remained away from the famous Gathering—for reasons which she would hardly avow even to herself; but then this was about the sole occasion of the year on which her mother suffered herself to be drawn forth from her seclusion; and that because she could so easily renew old friendships when the representatives of the great families of the north—the Grants and Frasers, the gay Gordons and gallant Grahams, the Macleods and Mackenzies, the Rosses, Sinclairs, Ogilvies, Farquharsons, with all their kith and kin—came trooping into the enclosure; and who more likely to receive an honoured welcome than the gentle Bean-an-Tighearn of Kinvaig, even though the glories of her house had gone? So Miss Eelin saw to it that her mother was dressed in her very smartest and neatest; and as for herself she had discarded her boyish Tam for headgear of a more young-ladyish kind; and when the hour had arrived, a cab was sent for, and they drove away to the scene of high revelry.

And here, just as their modest vehicle drew up, was Lady Helmsdale alighting from her barouche. She was a big woman, of imposing presence, hawk-faced, and capable-looking, with shrewd, observant grey eyes that had nevertheless a glint of humour in them at times.

"My dear Eelin," she cried, "I know you'll never forgive me; but I couldn't help it, indeed I could not help it; and I kept hoping to the very last: I tell you that clinical thermometer was hardly ever out of my

mouth—and his lordship jeering at me—'There you go, Janet, sucking that glass cigarette of yours'—but the wretch of a thing wouldn't come down to less than 101—sometimes it was 101·4—and how could I risk leaving the house? Never mind: I'll make it up to you to-night, Eelin dear; indeed I will; I'll be the most patient of chaperons; to-morrow morning's daylight will find me at my post, if you wish it——"

But at this point she had to take her turn at the wicket-gate; and therewithal the three of them passed through, and went along an opening between two of the stands, until the brilliant spectacle burst full upon their view—the long semi-circle of wooden erections, with their tiers upon tiers of onlookers, the spacious breadth of greensward, the octagonal platform on which four kilted Highlanders were dancing a reel, their cairngorms and silver ornaments flashing in the sun. There was no crowding along these benches, nor anything like it; nevertheless Mrs. Macdonald of Kinvaig and her daughter experienced a little difficulty in getting to their seats, for they seemed to be known to many of the people walking about on the grass, and these, one after the other, would come up to greet them with friendly inquiries. One elderly chieftain, indeed, in full array of tartan and eagle's plume, made so bold as to ask Miss Eelin what dances she was going to give him at the ball that evening; and Miss Eelin dutifully replied that it would be for himself to say if she brought him a blank programme. Eventually, however, they managed to make their way through these kindly folk, and then they ascended to their places, Lady Helmsdale accompanying them.

And truly it was a goodly display that now stretched away from them on each hand; for nowhere in all the world is there to be found such a concourse of handsome men and women as is brought together at this Northern Meeting at Invernish. Well-born, well-educated, trained from their earliest youth to every sort of athletic exercise and accomplishment, they form the very pick and flower of the English race; and perhaps it is permissible to speak of them as of the English race, for although their names may be Highland, and their Highland descent and traditions proudly and carefully cherished, it is probable that through intermarriage English blood predominates in at least a large minority of these families. Be that as it may; here they were: the young men in from the moors, and the hill-sides, and the corries, the young women from the salmon-rivers and the golf-links; with the light and glow of health in the clearness of their eyes and the freshness of their complexion; and with the grace of perfect physical condition in the movement of every limb. Of course, such an assemblage could not be strictly homogeneous; naturally there were a few aliens; for example, down there on the front bench was a beautiful Greek girl whose soft black eyes were regarding the reels and strathspeys with as concentrated an interest as if she were in the Stadion at Athens watching for the first runners coming in from Marathon's plain; Greek she was, in the splendour of her pale loveliness, though the people about her knew her as Lady Gordon of Grantly; and then again, just beyond her, there was a tall and most prepossessing American young person who had acquired the title of Lady Cameron of Inverfask, and who was

now standing talking to the Chief of her husband's clan. But it cannot honestly be said that these or their like detracted much from the general appearance of the distinguished throng.

And this was the assemblage in front of which there now presented himself a thick-set young man of clean-shaven and shining countenance, who wore a light grey covert-coat and a billy-cock hat, and had a binocular glass slung over his shoulder. The newcomer did not seem to be much abashed by those rows upon rows of spectators, whose attention, withdrawn for a moment from the performance of the Aldershot gymnastic team, might very probably fall upon himself; on the contrary, he sauntered along with an easy swagger, while his upward glance scrutinised tier after tier, obviously on the look-out for someone. And at last he found what he sought; he left the greensward; he ascended the wooden steps; he passed along an unoccupied bench, and the next minute he was gaily shaking hands with Mrs. Macdonald of Kinvaig and her daughter, and being introduced to Lady Helmsdale. Then the bunch of deep red roses he had brought with him: these he formally presented to Miss Eelin, whose cheeks were of about the same colour, and whose eyes certainly did not beam with responsive gratitude, for this was all too conspicuous a compliment, in so public a place. Nor did the horsey-looking young man seem inclined to go away, or even to take a seat; he remained standing in front of these ladies, so that he could address them all at once, in his airy and facetious and captivating fashion.

"You and I are to be friends to-night, Lady Helmsdale," said he, in his strident voice. "You know, I sym-

pathise with chaperons. Awful hard luck on them. Out of it altogether. They can't be for ever eating buns and drinking stale claret-cup. But I'll tell you what, now; supposing, as soon as the daylight begins to show itself, you and I should sneak out, and toddle down to the river-side, and watch them haul in the salmon-nets at the Friar's Shot? What d'ye say to that, now? A new idea, eh? For that's what keeps one going—something fresh, something novel, something stirring; scoop in all the experiences possible, for this miserable life is the only one ready to hand; get what you can, and swing along; full speed ahead—that's my motto! And talking of speed, have you heard about my project for getting the two iron bulls to come careering against each other, up in the Drumouchter Forest?"

"The railway engines? Yes, I have heard something of it," replied Lady Helmsdale—and her calm and contented grey eyes seemed to read through and through the inchoate brain of this happy-go-lucky youth.

"Will you come?" he said eagerly. "Do! It'll be awfully jolly if you will! At first I thought of having our own little party of three; but you'll be heartily welcome; and you'll just see whether I can manage things or not. You'll see. My years don't amount to threescore and ten as yet; but I've lived a goodish bit and made the most of my time; you'll see whether I can't bring that entertainment off in proper style. And there's another thing. I've been thinking. This is the idea, don't you understand. Two engines smashing into each other and knocking themselves to smithereens is all very well; but it ain't the real thing; I mean it isn't like the real thing—and I know that's what you'd like to behold,

from your seats in the little stand. And I've been considering; I've been considering whether I couldn't get a lot of artists' lay-figures—the big wooden things, you know, that always look broken at the waist—with their arms stuck out as if they wanted to dance the polka; a lot of second-hand ones would do well enough, and be cheaper; and I could get them rigged out in toggery, all as large as life and twenty times as natural; and I could make a bargain for one or two old disused third-class carriages to tack on to the engines, and my wooden friends could be stuck into them; and then, when the almighty crash came, then you'd see the genuine thing—dislocated legs and arms flying through the air—crushed-up corpses among the upset wheels and the roaring steam. How's that now? Is that an idea? Is that something of a swagger idea? Miss Eelin, what d'ye say?"

"Horrible!" the girl answered, with an involuntary shudder. "I could not look on at such a thing!"

"Oh, but you'll be persuaded!" he said, familiarly—and he stepped over the intervening bench and took his place at her side. "You'll be persuaded," he continued, in pleading and confidential tones. "I'm sure you will. You see, I haven't the gift of the gab; I never kissed the Blarney stone; and when I want to please anybody, I've got to try to *do* something. And for a high old raree-show, I think this exploit up there in the Drumouchter Forest will be hard to beat: arms and legs a-wallopin', wallopin', and the two iron bulls roaring at each other with their steam. All to ourselves, too; no reporters; no pictures in the illustrated papers. Ah, but there's one picture I should like to see in the illustrated papers,"

he went on, sentimentally, in a still lower voice—and what could she do (though all her wild and passionate soul was in revolt) but summon to her aid some outward show of resignation—her eyes averted from the crowd, as if that could prevent the crowd in turn regarding her and her companion, when a roving scrutiny of these raised benches filled up the gaps between the performances out there in the open? "Yes, that's the one picture I should like to see—best artists in London—I'd stump up for that, no fear—all guaranteed portraits—the bridal veil not quite hiding the beauty of the bride—distinguished friends in pews—everything trim and slap-up and proper—and the—the—the breath that breathed o'er Eden, don't you know."

"Lady Helmsdale," said Eelin, speaking across her mother, "I do hope they will take precautions about starting the bicycle races: there was a serious accident yesterday, when they were only practising."

But even this sufficient hint could not induce the stubborn young man to desist from his importunities and attentions. He wished to know at what hour she was likely to arrive at the ball; and wanted her to promise him all the barn-doors. He took the bunch of red roses, and smelt it caressingly, and returned it to her lap. He asked her which of the ladies' weekly papers she took in, and whether they announced engagements and forthcoming weddings. And so he held on, not heeding or not perceiving the indignant resentment conveyed by her silence; and meanwhile the various items in the programme were being got through, and the afternoon was wearing by.

Nevertheless, for some little time back, it had be-

come apparent that Mountmahon had grown just a trifle anxious; for more than once he had taken his field-glass from its case and directed it towards a portion of the wide meadow to which the public were admitted at a small charge.

"Those rascals of mine," he said to Eelin, "are awkward customers when their backs are set up. I hope they'll get decent places. If they can't see what's going on they'll make their way to the front somehow; and if anyone sets a finger on them, there'll be a scrimmage, and no error. Why, what's up now!" he exclaimed, with his binocular still levelled at the distant and nebulous mass of human beings, where, to all appearance, some little commotion had been aroused. "By Jove, they've got over the ropes! And the police—if the police lay a hand on one of them——"

He hurriedly shut up his glass and replaced it in the case.

"Miss Eelin, I must be off, or there will be a universal riot! Don't forget the barn-doors; but I'll be there in time—oh, yes, I will—you don't catch this child napping, while there's fun to the front. Good-bye, Mrs. Macdonald—awfully sorry you're not coming to the dance to-night. Lady Helmsdale, *au revoir*—we shall be chums this evening, or I'm mistaken." He glanced again towards the crowd. "By Jingo," he observed, with unusual earnestness, "if I'm not round there in a jiffey, there'll be corpusses laid out on the green!" And therewith he hastened away.

"Oh, mother," said Eelin, with a sigh of inexpressible relief, "don't you think we should go now?"

"I should like it—if you don't mind," the mother

said: she was looking tired, after the excitement of meeting with so many old friends.

"But, Mary," interposed Lady Helmsdale, in an undertone, "you really must let Eelin drive home with me. I shan't keep her half an hour; a cup of tea, and then she shall rejoin you. The dear child! Of course I had heard the rumours—but I didn't know what to think; and I must have a word with her—to wish her happiness."

The gentle Bean-an-Tighearn was too perturbed to protest; indeed, this was all too public a place for any remonstrance or explanation; and now the three ladies were descending to the greensward, continuing their way along to the entrance. Here Lady Helmsdale's carriage and Mrs. Macdonald's cab were called up; and when the latter had driven off, her ladyship, with much pride of possession, placed Eelin beside her in the barouche.

"My dear child!" she said, the moment they had started—and she had got hold of the girl's hand. "My heartiest congratulations! Of course I had heard—but seeing with one's eyes is better——"

"It is all a mistake, Lady Helmsdale!" Eelin cried, in great distress. "There is nothing between Lord Mountmahon and me, if that is what you mean——"

"Nothing?" exclaimed the elder lady. "And those roses—and the manner of presenting them."

Well, Eelin had brought the roses away with her as unthinkingly as she had brought away with her the programme of the day's sports; but now she snatched up the nosegay and flung it out of the carriage as though she had suddenly perceived among the petals the subtle eyes of a centipede.

"My dearest child, what does it all mean?" Lady Helmsdale cried again, and in almost a frightened way. "His attentions were so obvious—and intended to be obvious—everybody would assume—you may be certain everyone will assume what seemed to me so apparent. And then at the ball to-night—he is clearly bent on claiming you for his own——"

"Oh, dear Lady Helmsdale," said the girl, in an agony of entreaty, "couldn't you find me some plan for letting me stay away? I don't want to go to the ball!—indeed I do not!—a hundred thousand times I would rather stay away! Couldn't you find some excuse!"

"I could find some excuse," observed Lady Helmsdale, slowly, "for my not being able to take you—an excuse at the last moment. And I know your mother wouldn't think of bringing you herself; and as for anybody else at that late hour——"

"Oh, dear Lady Helmsdale, will you do that for me?" Eelin cried. "I shall be so grateful! I shall be so grateful! And as for my mother—well, I don't know what she expects of me; but—but—she cannot be angry if I stay away! Dear Lady Helmsdale, can you find an excuse?"

"Indeed I think I can," replied the shrewd-eyed dame, after a second or so. "But I fear I am venturing into a dangerous ploy. And I confess to you, my dear Eelin, that I had looked forward to your carrying everything before you to-night; and maybe I hoped to be thought something of myself—borrowing a little from your splendour, you know. Your black hair, your fine colour, I can see how impressive they would be in white, to say nothing of the wonderful necklace I've heard so

much of. But a girl does not like to be talked about—I understand—I understand; and you especially, that have always been so proud and independent. What your mother will say to me, if she should come to suspect, I need not think of just now. Mary St. Aubyn used to be my oldest and closest friend; but it's Mary St. Aubyn's daughter has the first claim on me at this moment; and, if you're sweirt to go to that ball, my dear, then it's not to that ball you're going—or my name's not Janet Helmsdale!"

By this time they were arrived at Sutherland Lodge, and when Lady Helmsdale had carried Eelin off to her own room, the first thing she did was to show her guest how, by placing a clinical thermometer in sufficiently warm water, the temperature recorded in the instrument may be raised to 102·6.

CHAPTER II.

A WILD PLUNGE.

THE moonlight night was gradually and silently unfolding itself like a flower; and something like the perfume of a flower came stealing in from the ghostly grey meadows and from the clumps of alder down by the stream. On the terraced portion of the tennis-lawn, under the wide-branching trees, Eelin was slowly pacing up and down, listening. In the perfect stillness sounds seemed to come from great distances; and amidst the vague murmur that told of the town, she thought she could detect the hushed, remote, continuous rattle of carriages driving up to the Assembly-rooms. Of course that was but a fancy: and it was a fancy that left no

envious sting behind it; she was well content to be where she was—free from apprehension—her own mistress—with all the witchery of this solitude around her. Lady Helmsdale's little scheme had worked admirably. At the last moment she had sent a note to her dearest Mary, saying she was in despair; not for worlds would she have disappointed Eelin, but here, before her eyes, was her clinical thermometer registering 102·8; it would be madness to venture out; who, then, could be found as a substitute to take the dear child under her wing? And at first the Bean-an-Tighearn's imagination went frantically seeking for some such substitute, and she would have sent off the servants to this one or that among her friends; until Eelin had demonstrated the futility of these efforts, and assured her mother that she would infinitely prefer to be left alone. Indeed the poor woman did not make much of a struggle; the fatigues of the day had given her a sick-headache of a desperate character; and eventually she was persuaded to betake herself to bed.

And thus it was that Eelin came to be walking all by herself on the terrace above the mysteriously-moving river; and far away was the dull golden glow shed by the lamps of the town: and out here above the dim grey fields and the darker woods the white moonlight increased in its soft radiance and there was a glory over the land. Then, from the other side of the wide current, came the voices of some young men and maidens who were most likely going in to have a look at the festivities; and presently their laughing and talking gave place to musical notes, for one of them had begun *A boat, a boat, haste to the ferry,* and very well they sang.

Nay, Miss Eelin, attracted by the measured cadence that came faintly across the water, herself joined in—in a low alto that could not have been heard half-a-dozen yards from where she stood—though she used the version Lily Neile and she were accustomed to sing together:

A boat, a boat, haste to the ferry,
For we are going to Altnaherry.

The next moment a wild project sprang into her head. Were these lads and lasses really going in to Union-street, to watch the arrival of the illustrious chiefs and chieftains, and their still more resplendent wives and daughters? And could not she also, with a sufficient disguise, join in the crowd to become an unobserved onlooker, recognising one after another as each successive carriage drove up? Would she be in time to see how Lily Neile was looking, and how her dress became her? Surely a tartan shawl over her head and shoulders, and brought well round her face, would enable her to avoid detection? It would be an adventure, anyway; and she might pick up some of the *voces populi,* for the subsequent amusement of her girl-companions.

Now the tartan of the Macdonalds of Kinvaig consists mainly of deep purples, blues, and greens, so that this was a very sombre figure that presently went away along the banks of the silver-trembling Nish. And in process of time the moonlit world was exchanged for the world of gas; though, to be sure, when she had crossed the Suspension-bridge, and entered the main thoroughfare there, she was nearly on the point of abandoning her undertaking. For the whole town was in an uproar; arm-linked youths lolled along the pavements, vainly

endeavouring to sing choruses in tune; pipers skirled at random, regardless of audiences, in any convenient corner of lane or alley; now and again the convergence of the mob threatened to block the way; but all the same the slow string of cabs and carriages crawled onward, depositing party after party at the glowing entrance to the Assembly-rooms. And although Miss Eelin had never before been in the streets of Invernish on such an occasion and at such an hour; and although the rough-and-ready conduct of her neighbours from time to time rather frightened her, still she was by nature tenacious of purpose; ske kept edging herself along; courteously yielding one second, gently insinuating herself the next; until at last she had obtained a position from which she could very well survey the drawing-up of the carriages, and the stepping-out of the gay throng, and their crossing the strip of red baize that led to the brilliantly-lit doorway.

And within the safe concealment of this voluminous shawl she found herself very merry and light-hearted; she laughed to herself to think that now she could spy upon her various friends and acquaintances, and criticise their appearance and expression and costume, without herself being subjected to any similar ordeal; it seemed to her that she had all the fun of the fair without any of its serious entanglements. Unhappily she appeared to have missed Lily Neile; perhaps that young lady had come early, to have her pick of partners; but here were plenty of others whom she knew, descending one by one to cross the pavement, and forming very pretty groups in the hall-way, their pale-hued attire appearing all the more effective because of the rich background of

military uniforms and full Highland costume. And did no sense of injury, no jealous grudging, stir within the bosom of this hooded spectator? Not one bit. She hoped all the girls would find excellent dancers; she knew that the chaperons would prove considerate; she trusted there were bowers and alcoves for the sitters-out; she wished the whole company of them happiness and delight, and (the girls especially) the consciousness of looking their best. For "nowhere beats the heart so kindly as beneath the tartan plaid"; and sure enough this was a Highland shawl that wrapped her round.

Her friendly reveries were rudely interrupted. There stepped forth from a cab two young men—both of them in ordinary evening dress—one of whom she recognised only too easily. Burly and beaming and shining and polished he was, laughing and joking loudly with his companion, his clean-shaven, pot-boy face showing a rollicking good humour. Mountmahon did not see her —indeed, could not see her; but all the same, and with an indescribable loathing, she started back to get away; and in doing so touched the foot of someone immediately behind her. Instantly she turned to apologise.

"I beg your pardon!—I'm sure I beg your pardon!" she said—and at the same moment she found that Archie Gilchrist was looking down upon her, and staring at her, in profound amazement. He was not to be deceived by any close-drawn head-covering: he had seen her eyes—he had heard her voice: the eyes and the voice of the woman he loved: it was not likely that he could be deceived.

"Oh, how do you do, Mr. Gilchrist?" she said, in rather an incoherent fashion. "I—I wanted to see one

or two of them pass in. But now I'm off home. Good-night!"

"You must let me see you through the crowd," he said—though he had clearly not got over his astonishment at finding her in such a place and in such a guise. "The other side of the street will be better." And with that, and slightly preceding her, he piloted her across to the opposite pavement, where there were fewer passers-by: the straggling populace of Invernish had concentrated itself round the entrance to the rooms.

"But," she said to him presently, "are you not going to the ball?"

"Oh, no," he answered her.

"I thought you meant to write an article on all the amusements of the week?"

"Yes, and so I may," he said, "from the point of view of an outsider. But I could not go to the ball. I dared not risk the chance of seeing you dancing with the man who crossed the pavement when you turned away just now."

"You mean Lord Mountmahon," she said calmly. "Well, yes, if I had gone, I suppose I must have danced with him."

"And the devil himself never invented a more ghastly profanation!" he said, with an intensity of feeling that startled her. She did not look up, to gather the expression of his face. And as she remained silent he went on: "I had witnessed enough to-day. I saw him at the Games. I was there, within the enclosure. I saw him paying court to you—before all the known families in the Highlands. I saw him give you flowers—a man like that! And perhaps—perhaps I heard

something of the common talk; anyway, I could not stay; nor did I venture to go near that ball-room to-night, except as a reporter watching the arrivals. There are some things that provoke only indignation and pity —and indignation and pity that are of no avail; and it is better to keep away."

Well, it was no part of her duty to defend herself against any accusation, however obscurely implied, brought forward by this young man. He was not much more than an acquaintance; interesting in himself, no doubt, and still more interesting with regard to his literary schemes and dreams and aspirations; yet hardly so intimate with her as to entitle him to assume the position of monitor and judge. Nevertheless, there was a ring of sincerity in his voice; and his manner was not presumptuous, but quite the reverse of that; and thus it was that Wild Eelin, instead of hotly resenting his interference, found herself meekly replying:

"If I were you, Mr. Gilchrist, I think I would not pay so much attention to what people say. As for the bunch of roses, well, refusing them would probably have attracted more notice than accepting them; and indeed I thought so little about them, one way or the other, that as soon as we got outside I threw them into the street. Then about this ball, and my dancing with Lord Mountmahon, or sitting out dances with him: suppose for a moment that I remained away for the very purpose of avoiding any such possibility? Why otherwise should I be here, walking homeward, with a shawl round my head?"

He could not find words to express his remorse and self-reproach.

"Will you ever forgive me?" he pleaded. "I had no right to say what I did, even if the worst were true. It was not my place. Only—only—there is this. It may not be much of an excuse; but there is this: that when one has found—even with a great distance separating—when one has found one's ideal of all that is beautiful and honourable and pure and sweet in womanhood, then—then one dreads the approach of anything likely to contaminate it. And so there may be causeless apprehensions and fears; yes, and there may be presumption too. But if you will forgive me this time, I will not presume again."

He had so humbled himself that she was sorry for him; and she went out of her way to be kind to him; and would lead the talk towards his immediate occupations and affairs, and to the volume on Tannahill and Hector Macneill that he and she were to bring out together. By this time they had got away from the dinsome town and were out in the moonlit solitudes; but there was no suggestion on the part of either that he should relinquish his charge of her: they continued their leisurely walk by the white-glinting stream. Not that they were the sole occupants of this phantom world. Far on the other side of the river a drunk soldier was seated on the bank, most mournfully singing "My Nannie's awa'." He was not a ferocious warrior, but a peaceful; his plaintive ditty meant no harm to anyone; he was merely commiserating himself on the absence of Nannie. Two difficulties he had to contend with: the one was a recalcitrant memory, so that every now and again he would stop altogether and hark back; the other

was the presence of grace-notes at the beginning of the repetition of each last line.

"They mind me o' Nannie, but Nannie's awa'—The . . . y mind me o' Nanhie, but Nannie's awa'." It was the second *The . . y* that bothered him so fearfully; but he was a conscientious performer; he would attack those preliminary flourishes, and wrestle with them, and heroically strive to overcome them; until he appeared to get sick-tired of the whole affair; he stretched out his legs on the bank, and turned over on his side, and no doubt was immediately fast asleep.

And meanwhile around the two wanderers the enchanted world had grown hushed and still—as silent as their ebony-black shadows on the silver-grey road; so that every tone, and modulation, perhaps even an occasional tremor, of their speech could be heard by each of them, for recalling and remembrance. And Archie Gilchrist was in a confidential mood—into which she had led him unawares: in particular he was telling her of the joy and pride with which his mother, the poor old woman up in Dingwall, had beheld his first appearances in the columns of a newspaper; and how convinced, how bravely convinced, she was of his ultimate success; and how she would be more than ever confirmed in her prognostications if once he could show her his name on the title-page of an actual, tangible, printed book. Of the perfect and beautiful devotion of these two, mother and son, to each other, there could be no doubt in the mind of anyone who listened to these recollections; and Eelin liked to hear him talk in this way—it was so human, and tender, and true; she felt that she was drawn closer and closer to him in sym-

pathy; she followed these confessions with little gratified expressions of assent; hers was a nature to understand this man and his humble surroundings and his hopes, and she paid him the tribute of something more than respect.

Then he was emboldened to reveal to her his great immediate ambition, which was nothing less than this—that the old woman in Dingwall should come for a day to Invernish for the purpose of being introduced to Miss Macdonald of Kinvaig—that her eyes might behold her for a moment or two, and perhaps a few words be exchanged; whereupon the girl, in the audacious frankness of her generosity, immediately exclaimed—

"No, indeed! Why should she be put to the trouble of travelling? I will go through to Dingwall and call on her!"

"That would hardly do," he said hurriedly. "If you were to be so kind as that, she—she might make a mistake. She is a great reader; she lives a good deal in the world of romance; and she might think that wild and impossible things were going to happen——"

"What things?" she asked.

He had need of all his self-control; the cry of his heart was very near to his lips.

"Impossible things," he said, curtly. "No. Some day I will go through to Dingwall, and bring back my mother with me; because—because I wish her to see you for even a minute. That day will record my high-water mark: thereafter——"

"Yes?"

"Thereafter the old mother will go home again to Dingwall, where the few people she knows live. And

as for myself, I shall resume my solitary work, giving up —but surely not without gratitude—associations and friendships I am not entitled to——"

"And why solitary work?" she asked again. "Is that good for you—or for anybody?"

"Perhaps not," he said, absently. "Solitariness is apt to chill one's sanguine enthusiasms. Being alone is a disheartening kind of thing; one's faith in one's self is so apt to give way. It isn't thinking of the 'mighty poets in their misery dead'; it's thinking of the millions of competitors who are alive, and blocking every avenue. Never mind, success isn't everything. My fight through the world may be long, and dreary, and a failure; but it need not be ignoble. My pen shall not be a venal one. I will never debase my calling. And there is nothing dishonourable in poverty—if that is to be the end——"

"But why should you talk in that way?" she answered him, gently. "And why should you voluntarily give up friendships that you yourself appear to value? Do you think that it is only the proud old lady in Dingwall who looks forward to a great future for her son? There may be others who believe in you; who know what you will do; and who are only too willing to offer you comradeship and good-fellowship and sympathy and help. And why should you refuse?—why should you turn away?——"

Then the delirium of the moonlight night leapt to his brain.

"Eelin," he said, "in that future, whatever it may have in store, will you be at my side? Eelin, will you be my wife?"

And who can tell what sudden "impulses of soul and sense" may not at this same moment have swept away her reason from her? She turned her eyes full on him; she extended both hands; she said, with a fine courage—

"Yes, I will!—I will!"

And then he would have drawn her towards him to kiss her as a sign and sealing of the compact; but she shrank away from him; and got free.

"Oh, no—not *that!*" she said, in mingled alarm and distress. "I—I will explain—I will write and explain. Good-night!"

For by this time they had reached the gate of Glengarva House.

"But I have your promise!" he said, breathlessly.

"Oh, yes, yes, you have my promise," she answered him, as she opened the gate, and again and noiselessly bade him farewell.

Morag the Mull lass was in the hall, sitting up for her young mistress.

"Oh, Miss Eelin," she said, in great concern, "what for have you stayed so late in the garden? There are fearful beings about—and they are the most treacherous when the moon is clear——"

"Toots, blethers!" said Miss Eelin, in good-natured scorn. "Lock the door, and put out the lights, and get to bed."

As for her she went upstairs to her room in rather a gay and gallant mood. She had not in the least realised as yet what she had done.

CHAPTER III.

ENGAGED LOVERS.

At each end of Eelin's dressing-table there was a lighted candle; between these was placed her writing-desk; and now in the early hours of the morning she was laboriously trying to compose a letter. But on this occasion the ready pen and readier wit of "White Cockade" had forsaken her; she had made many efforts, and as many failures; and these had not been torn up and thrown into the waste-paper basket—they had been carefully put aside for some safer form of destruction. After all, it is not an easy thing for a proud-spirited and sensitive young woman to explain to the man she has just promised to marry that she would rather be safeguarded from endearments and demonstrations of affection; somehow the phrases would not come right; they were cold, unsympathetic, unmannerly, unmaidenly. The tragic humour of the situation was that she should consider it necessary to write in this strain to Archie Gilchrist of all persons in the world. It is true that when she promised to be his wife he had offered to kiss her, as was but natural in the circumstances; but the slight involuntary gesture with which she had shrunk back was for him as a wall of iron between them. Did she fear his insisting on his rights of possession? Then it was little she knew of the man to whom she had pledged her life.

And at last she abandoned the hopeless task; she threw herself back in the cushioned chair; and stared blankly before her, at the twin blinds of the partitioned

window. At first she did not notice any change; her eyes had grown accustomed to the yellow glare thrown upward by the candles, and to the dull reflection of it opaquely returned by those vertical lengths of linen; but of a sudden it occurred to her that this opacity had partly disappeared and that a certain transparency had taken its place. The blinds were no longer yellow, but more nearly their natural colour of bluish-white. And then she understood. If the new day was not yet here, at least there were indications of its approach; and so she got up, and extinguished the candles, and went into the little windowed recess from which she could look out on the awakening world.

But not yet awakened. Sleep hushed and profound dwelt over the hanging woods; the cold, steel-grey surface of the stream was undisturbed by any breath of morning air; not a leaf stirred; the night still seemed to claim its own. Nevertheless above the foliaged heights across the river—those brooding heights that had become a bank of solid, dark, rich olive-green—were premonitions of the wonders of the dawn: here and there a touch of ineffable rose—a transparent swathe of faintest saffron—a mystic glow that came stealing into the heavens, waxing warmer and clearer minute by minute. Were they still at their dancing in yonder town? Or was it not time for the last of the carriages to be summoned, lest maidens' cheeks should look pale in confronting the splendour now mounting into the skies?

But was the world indeed so empty? It appeared to her that for the briefest second her absently-gazing eyes had caught sight of a figure crossing an open glade in the bushes opposite the distant weir. And if this were

not a ghost—if this were an actual human being—very well she knew who it must be. Who but a demented poet would be haunting the Islands at such an hour? And then she looked at the pile of unfinished letters, suggestive of an impossible endeavour; and she thought the explanation would be ever so much easier if she could see him face to face; and if there were any chance of meeting him, what more auspicious moment than the present, when there would be no passers-by to intrude? It was a prospect that at once filled her with a sense of joyous deliverance. She forthwith locked up the discarded correspondence, to be dealt with by-and-bye; she finished her dressing—but carefully enough; and then she got away downstairs and out of doors. If she were to be missed, no one would express much surprise: the household were familiar with Wild Eelin's ways.

By this time the dawn had declared itself right royally: the zenith was a wonder and glory of lustrous orange clouds, with interstices of deep purple; and so all-pervading was the flame that the smoother breadths of the current, no longer of a cold steel-grey, had caught a warm bronze hue, under the soft green of the rowans and alders. As she passed through the wicket, and followed the pathway leading between the fields and the shingly banks of the stream, she noticed that the mists were slowly drawing up the hillsides; but the darker mountains in the south did not seem as yet to have emerged from the night.

At first she walked quickly; but when she came to the well of sweet water, and turned to cross the first of the small bridges, she knew that now she must intercept

the stranger, whoever he might be, if he were anywhere about these Islands. And so (with affected carelessness of observation) she wandered along the winding avenues, under the branches of beech and lime and elm; and now and again she got a glimpse of her own home, far away on the other side of the river, with no sign of life about it yet. Next she came upon Archie Gilchrist. He was seated on a wooden bench, with two or three books by him, an open one on his knee, and a pencil in his hand. .When the slight sound of her footsteps caused him to look up, he was as one paralysed, and he grew very pale.

"Oh, no," she said, smiling, in reply to his affrighted stare—only, as she advanced towards him, she was as rose-red as he was white—"I am myself. I am not a spectre. Do you ever see spectres—spectres of me, I mean—when you come about the Islands at these unholy hours?—for I hope I don't 'walk' in that way——"

The small gloved hand she gave him was certainly not the hand of a phantom; but he was still startled.

"I did not see you come along the other side," he said. "And—and—I was thinking of you—and for a moment I imagined my eyes had conjured up a spirit—I have heard of such things——"

He had gathered his books together, and she seemed to assume that he would accompany her, as she turned back on the way she came.

"I wished to see you," she said—and he was walking with her now—"I have been trying to write to you; but I could not explain in that way. And of course there must be explanations and apologies. If the en-

gagement we jumped into or fell into last night is to remain——"

"If it is to remain?" he repeated—but without reproach: it was for her to say whether it should remain or not.

"Then I've got to apologise for my upbringing," she continued, "and you'll have to take me for what I am —a pretty bad lot. You see, my mother is a very fastidious woman; and perhaps she has taught me a little too much personal pride—a sort of dislike for molly-coddling—perhaps even a disdain—that one is sorry for, you know—but there it is—an imperfection, that one must apologise for—and it might wear off in time, who can tell? For don't fancy I'm a prude! Oh, no, I'm not; I'm not a sniffer; I like fun—and lots of it; only—only——"

"And you think I cannot understand?" he said to her gently. And somehow she knew that he did understand—and she was greatly comforted.

All the same—and still with conscious colour in her cheek, and with downcast eyes—she continued to make little stammering excuses for her independence, her maiden reserve, and shyness—as if any such were necessary to this man, whose attitude towards her was all of mute worship, and deference, and obedience, and surrender of self; and by this time they had strayed from the usual walks and had come to the upper end of the middle island, which here narrows itself to a point, cleaving the wide current in twain. Here also, facing the open stretch of landscape, is a wooden seat plentifully adorned with carved initials; and so happy did Eelin feel at having got over her pleas and extenuations

and established herself on a frank and free and safe footing with him that she suggested they should sit down for a little further talk, and he was nothing loth. Loth? It was a kind of maddening intoxication to be so near her; why, as they sate there, her skirts very nearly touched his foot; under the soft folds of her silken blouse he could see the quiet rise and fall of her breathing: when she laughed it sounded so close that it almost seemed himself laughing, so quickly responsive was his sympathy to her every mood. And she was trying to be very kind towards him. She felt secure with him. She was grateful that he had so promptly dispelled all her embarrassment. And he listened, and could have gone on listening; for the mere thrill and delight of her presence—those two alone together in this great, brilliant world of sky and mountain and hanging foliage and rushing water—the mere physical thrill and delight in the consciousness of her presence was enough. But at last he said—

"Why, Eelin, you don't in the least seem to understand the magnitude of the sacrifice you are making! Yes; and it isn't as if you were drawn to it by any compelling affection or craving for affection—for I cannot believe that—I don't blind myself; it appears to me you are rather giving yourself away out of a generous goodheartedness—out of *bonne camaraderie*——"

"Ah, but you don't know," said she, smiling again. "By what sin fell the angels? Suppose I imagine myself to be a judge of character; and suppose I think I foresee a great future for someone; and suppose I am ambitious enough to wish to share it—what then? And you think you on your side are surrendering nothing?

Ah, but you are," she went on—and so musical was her voice and so winning her air and expression and the varying charm of her manner that he found it difficult to follow her argument, if there was an argument: he was ready to agree to anything. "But you are," she said. "You are giving up 'A man's a man for a' that.'"

He was bound to protest—but it was in no energetic way.

"Oh, yes," she insisted. "You admitted that the great Declaration of Swagger didn't apply to one half of the human race; then if it does not apply to one half of the human race, it cannot apply to the other. Do you see? Are you convinced? For that's what they call logic."

She was as one gone daft; and in this idle and good-humoured fashion she rambled on, hardly waiting for any reply to her demure and inconsequent playfulness. Was it to put him at his ease—to reassure him—to cause this association and sympathy she offered him as the basis of their relationship to appear a simple and natural thing? The situation was altogether extraordinary; yet she seemed happy and well-content; he had not even put his hand within her arm, as brother and sister are wont to do.

Then into the heaven of his bliss leapt a lover's easily-excited alarms. He began to wonder whether she had divined his strong and deep and unconquerable love for her, and recognised its inevitable hopelessness, and in some wild freak of compunction had offered herself to him in this unfettered way as a kind of atonement. He already knew that there was no limit to the

impulsive and unselfish generosities of this brave lass. But if that were all the response she could make to the passionate yearning of his soul, what hope would there be for their married life? *L'un qui aime, et l'autre qui se laisse aimer:* it may be an admirable arrangement for a time—perhaps even with an attractive touch of pathos about it; but how long is it likely to endure?

No, there was no cuddling and fondling between these engaged lovers, even in this propitious solitude and silence. She was advancing the proposition—and her eyes were perfectly grave—that in every meteorological office throughout the country there ought to be established a large salt-water tank containing a live salmon; for what more infallible prognosticator could there be of a change in the weather? But alas! the mere mention of the salmon recalled to her that old Fergus would now be at work on the opposite bank; and that it behoved her to get away home, before anyone else should question her. Her companion was for going that way also.

"It would hardly be discreet—would it?" she said. "Old Fergus might wonder—mightn't he?"

And so they walked back to the parting of their routes—his that was to take him straight into the town, hers that was to take her across the small bridges to the other side; and at this point, and with a light and buoyant step, she left him. Was it the pale huntress, then, whom he had encountered in these woodland wiles, in the mystic regions of the dawn? But not any one of the Greek goddesses, however chaste and fair and radiant, had the mantling colour of this Highland girl—no, nor her all-conquering eyes—nor her merry and derisive tongue—nor her swinging, boyish stride that was carry-

ing her so rapidly away from him. Then the rowan-bushes, and the willows, and the alders hid her from his sight; and perhaps he came back to his senses; and perhaps he did not.

As he walked away into the town, lines and phrases and fragments from "Maud" were singing themselves through his brain—"Queen Maud in all her splendour" —"O Maud were sure of Heaven, if lowliness could save her"—and the like; and he was arguing with himself, and trying to prove to himself, that there could be no possible likeness between scent and sound: nevertheless when he was summoning up again to himself the rich, soft notes of Wild Eelin's voice—whether she was meekly assenting, or whether she was openly mocking at him, or whether she was lending him some of her own high courage in contemplating the future—these low and half-hushed tones of hers somehow and strangely seemed to recall to him the perfume of sweet-briar, just as the rain is ceasing, and when the sunlight is coming again into the warm summer air.

CHAPTER IV.

BRUNHILDE.

"Top o' the morning to you, Fergus!" she called to him, above the din of the weir. "Why don't you howk him out?"

"I canna stir him," was the answer that came back from the fisherman, who was wading deep, and throwing a beautiful line.

"It's because you don't fish properly!" she continued, jeering at him. "Man alive, do you call that fishing!

Why don't you haul a yard of slack under the reel—and shake out the line with the point of the rod—and give the fly a chance of working? Don't follow the fly round! dear, dear, that I should have to come round to give you lessons!"

He turned to her.

"Ay, and what mischief will ye be after this morning?" he asked of her, with the familiarity of an old crony.

"Oh, Fergus," she said, in a burst of candour, "I would cut off my head and lay it at your feet if you could only teach me to throw a line like that!"

"There's not a leddy in the north of Scotland will throw a better line than yourself, Miss Eelin," said he —with another of the long Spey casts going whistling out.

"Oh—oh!" she cried. "And you know what you told General Mallock about Lily Neile!"

"I did not! I did not!" he maintained, stubbornly. "I said she would keep longer at it, maybe. You're too impatient; and that's all the fault I've to find with ye."

"Well, I wish you good luck!" she called to him; and then as she went on again she said to herself: "And you might wish me good luck in return, Fergus, for I've much need of it." Not that she was in any way dejected about the future; she was quite the reverse of that. She had secured safety for herself—even physical safety, for had she not seen the same Archie Gilchrist take up the leg of a cane-bottomed chair and belabour a whole rabble of roughs into ignominious flight? Moreover, it was a kind of alliance that left her so entirely untram-

melled. Brunhilde the warrior-maiden could not have been left more entirely her own mistress. And for the rest such sinister phrases as "I generally get what I want, don't you know" seemed to have less significance now: nay, could they not be altogether dismissed and forgotten?

Indeed as she walked along this pathway between the beds of pink-grey shingle and the running river on the one hand and on the other the wide fields and the far shining uplands, one might have guessed her to be "fey." Light-headed she appeared to be as well as light-hearted; for with an immeasurable pathos she was reciting to herself—

"I wish I were where Eelin lies;
Night and day on me she cries;
O that I were where Eelin lies
On fair Kirkconnell lee."

And then it was (the empty brain careering about anywhere)

"Hard fate that I should banished be,
And rebel called with scorn,
For serving of the kindest prince
That ever yet was born.

O my king—God save my king!—
Whatever me befall!
I would not be in Huntly's case,
For honours, lands, and all."

And then again it was—while the oxen in the meadow were staring at her with their great, soft, inquiring eyes—

"But let them say, or let them dae,
It's a' ane to me;

For he's low doon, he's in the broom
That's waiting for me:
Waiting for me, my love,
He's waiting for me;
For he's low doon, he's in the broom
That's waiting for me."

Only, when she drew near the house, she had to put a curb on her rodomontade: for she perceived that the blinds of her mother's bedroom were still lowered; and what her scattered wits had now to concentrate themselves upon was the question of arranging the most seductive breakfast she could frame for the poor invalid: hot and strong tea, to begin with; then a fried egg, with the yolk thin and hard, and yet not altogether hard, and just touched with cayenne; the white of the egg crisp and brown and alluring, with a sprinkling of grey pepper; the garniture some sprays of water-cress steeped in vinegar. Then there was a particular kind of phlox, the extremely delicate scent of which her mother was fond of; and she thought she would go on into the garden to gather a few bunches; so that when she went into the sick-room she would be carrying with her a breath of the sweet outside air.

But she had not gone past the laurel-bushes when she suddenly drew up; she heard voices, and through the leaves she could see that Morag had brought out a row of boots and shoes to polish here in the open, while old Maxwell, having delivered his consignment of garden-produce, was engaging her in conversation. And Miss Eelin wondered whether the Mull lass would remember the instructions she had received.

"Ay, and wha ur ye this mornin?" Maxwell asked of her, in his Lowland tongue.

"I am thinking I am myself," the Highland girl replied. "And who else would I be, I wonder?"

"It's little ye ken!" he answered, partly in scorn, partly in pity. "Ye're a puir crayture and ye canna understand; I've tellt ye again and again, but the doctrine of the transmotion of souls is beyond ye—"

"Ferry well, then," said Morag, sharply, "and if you are the black murderer you say, why are you not giving yourself up and going to be hanged?"

"Woman, woman, ye canna comprehend—is it no possible for your intelleck to comprehend? David Haggart was executed at Edinburgh the 18th of July, 1821; ye wadna hae twa men hanged for the same crime; and I declare tae ye there was no intent on my pairt to murder onybody. Indeed there was not. I had got the bag with a stane in't; I'll no deny that; but I hit the jiler only wan clowt wi't; and then I rushed across the yard, and pulled the dub from my cloy, and opened the outside door. It was days efter before I kent that the jiler was deed. I was hidin' in some hay; and I heard a woman asking a boy if the lad that had brokken oot o' Dumfries jile was catched yet, and he said, 'No, but the jiler deed last nicht at ten o'clock.' Dod, that was a fearsome thing to hear; that was a different business frae snibbing a lil from a conish cove's suck—"

"Yes, and what will all that be?" inquired Morag, with a supercilious air.

"Ay, they dinna ken everything in Mull!" he retorted, with a grim facetiousness. "They're no very gleg at the uptak, ur they? It's a wise man that can follow his nose; but they havena learnt that yet in Tobermory, or they wouldna be aye tummelin into the harbour. Oh,

they're a fine set, the Tobermory chiels, keepin' up the New Year till the 15th o' December, and beginnin' again on the 16th. I heard tell there was yince a sober man discovered i' the streets o' Tobermory; but they didna ken what to do wi' him, so they sent him to a lunatic asylum—"

Of a sudden Morag uttered three piercing shrieks, and her arm was outstretched, and her gaze was fixed on some distant point beyond the washing green.

"Look! look! look!" she cried. "It's the ghost of the Dumfries chiler! It's the ghost of the murdered man."

Now in ordinary cold blood old Maxwell would not have allowed himself to be deceived by the cantrips of this Mull idiot; but her yells had startled him out of his senses; involuntarily he wheeled round, to see what the terrible thing was; and at the same moment Morag, using the only weapon she happened to have handy—which was the blacking brush—struck him fair and full between the shoulders, and that with a force that sent him staggering forward on all-fours. What happened next the Mull lass did not stay to observe. She had fulfilled her instructions: only she did not know that, as she swiftly picked up the boots and shoes and fled for refuge to the housekeeper's room, there was someone else besides herself who was in fits of laughter—and that was a young lady concealed behind some laurel-bushes.

The great bunches of phlox—so sweet and cool in their delicate perfume—were most welcome to the weary-eyed invalid; she cared less for the suggestion about the fried egg and the hot tea; she seemed to prefer the dumb twilight of the blinds being down, and the gracious

quiet; while her daughter's voice, as she stole about the room, was as soft as velvet. So the day passed somehow; and then in the afternoon a visitor arrived, whom Eelin went down to receive, with apologies for her mother's absence. The visitor was Lord Mountmahon; and he appeared to be labouring under some sense of injury.

"Oh, really, now, really, really," said he, "I never was so badly treated in all my life. Do you think I'd have gone to that twopenny-halfpenny kick-up unless on the understanding you were to be there? Why, everybody was saying you would be the Queen of the Ball! Yes, and there I was—there I was—waiting and watching—waiting and watching—but where were you? What made the assembly shine? Well, the assembly didn't shine!—not much! And of course I must fall into the hands of that old cat Lady Grillesmere; and I'll be hanged if she hasn't got fifteen thousand nieces—well, to be strictly honest and accurate, I'll take off a thousand—and I'll be dashed if she hasn't got fourteen thousand nieces—and all of them have sandy hair, and all of them squint; and may I never if I hadn't to dance with every man-jack of them—"

"Oh, I'm so sorry, Lord Mountmahon," said Eelin, somewhat inappropriately; but she did not heed much what she said; she was less afraid now of the pot-boy-looking young man.

"Yes, you may well think that," he answered her, commiserating himself. "All sandy-haired, all squint-eyed—twenty thousand of them I believe there were—and the old cat was inexorable—one down, t'other come on—not a minute's time for a cigarette and a whiskey-

and-soda—and me looking for you all the time—why, of course!—the Queen of the Ball—the Queen of the Ball, they said—and I will confess to you that I did hear my name coupled with yours—rather gratifying, don't you know—a happy omen—yes, there was more than one little reference——"

"Oh, indeed," said Eelin, with the big young eyes staring; who had dared in so public a way to mention her name in conjunction with this microcephalous lout?

"Ah, never mind," said he, with great satisfaction. "We'll make up for it to-night: better late than never; no crying over spilt milk, and that's my motto. And mind you save all the barn-doors for me, Miss Eelin——"

"But I am not going to the ball to-night, Lord Mountmahon," said she.

"What?" he exclaimed. "Oh, but that's nonsense; you certainly are; I can't be cheated twice running—everyone mentioning names—and forecasting a little event. Queen of the Ball, that's what you are going to be; and we'll just show them what a barn-door is like, when we put a little swag into it. Why, bless my soul, not going to-night——"

"My mother is not well: I meant to stay at home——"

"Stuff and nonsense!" he said, with gay good-humour. "Your staying at home won't make your mother any better. Why, what do you suppose I'm in Invernish for? Do you suppose I came in here to teetotumise round Lady Grillesmere's thirty thousand sandy-haired nieces? Why, I'm supposed to be entertaining a house-party at Kinvaig; and do you imagine I don't know what they'll be up to the moment my back is turned? But I do

know—yes I do. Off to the hill they go—and not one of them able to hit a haystack—and they blaze and blaze—my cartridges, mind—oh, yes, they take precious good care of that—hundreds and hundreds ordered out from Watson, in Inglis-street—all to my account—and they blaze and blaze—and the keepers driven mad—and the dogs demoralised—and the ground spoilt—and at the end of the day an old grey hen or a solitary curlew to show for the lot of 'em. Yes, and netting the pools—ah, but I know—I'm up to their tricks——"

"Then why do you invite people of that kind?" Miss Eelin asked, naturally enough.

"They're such comical devils!" he protested. "They keep things going—firing ahead—getting a rise out of someone—plenty of gammon and spinach. For that's my motto: always on the do. You only live once; bless my soul, what's the use of getting down below the daisies prematurely?—you'll be there long enough. Keep on the do: that's my motto. Why, there's little Teddy Hicks—I must bring him here some day—oh, yes, I will—just make you die of laughing—his description of a fellow proposing to a girl and finding his nose begin to bleed—in a blue funk, of course—lost his handkerchief—I tell you, it's the funniest thing—I've seen a whole dinner-table in fits. And talking of a proposal—no, no, my dearest girl, don't you look frightened!—I'm content to wait: it's quite true I never take no for an answer—what's the good!—but I'm not an early Christian persecutor; I would rather let the little idea simmer in your mind, till you get to see how reasonable it is. And if I haven't the gift of the gab, there's one thing I do know: you'd find yourself dashed well looked after. Ah,

wouldn't you, though! Your mother tells me you've never been in Brighton. Good gracious, to think of such a thing! Bless me, the very centre of life—the very centre of everything that's worth anything—the King's Road—the Old Ship—a slap-up suite of rooms—sunshine galore—the coaches coming and going—tootle-too all the morning—old pals waving you a hand—bless me—good gracious—why, that's life! Keep things moving. No stagnation for this infant. Why, I'd rather be dead and buried right off the reel than have to crawl and crawl to the grave. Miss Eelin, I can see you on the first floor of the Old Ship, looking out. Oh, I know the place: trust me: you trust me: if I can't order a ripping little lunch for the two of us, then take me away and fling me into the nearest horse-pond. And you're coming to that ball to-night. Yes, you are. Your mother's sure to be better by then. I'll be waiting for you—now mind. All the barn-doors: and we'll sit out the lancers—and the waltzes, too, if you like: and we'll make it a perpetual bun-fight for old Mother Helmsdale. And as for the fifteen thousand three hundred and forty-seven sandy-haired nieces of Lady Grillesmere, don't you see, I've polished them off already—waiting for you, that's what it was—and now you've got to make it up to me, for fair play's a jewel—and you're not going to cheat me to-night again—"

At this moment the drawing-room door was opened, and Miss Lily Neile was announced: whereupon—after some further insistence that Eelin must not fail him at the ball—Mountmahon took his departure.

"Oh, Eelin, is it true?" cried Lily Neile.

"Is what true?" Eelin made answer—and the proud lips were not the less proud.

"Why, what everyone is saying—about you and Lord Mountmahon!"

"I cannot help them saying what they choose to say," responded Eelin of the eyes like the blue sea-wave, "but—but—at least I—I considered you were my friend. And you could think that of me!"

At which there was a mutual breaking-down, and much of hugging and kissing and protestation and tears, for this girl, high-spirited as she might be, perhaps was not quite so confident about the future as she pretended to herself.

CHAPTER V.

RUMOURS AND TIDINGS.

NOISELESS as a night-moth Eelin stole to her mother's room, and carefully opened the door. But the moment she glanced inward she perceived that no further precaution was needed; the blinds were drawn up; nectarines and biscuits were on the small table; the invalid, propped with pillows, was blandly reading a newspaper.

"Ah, this is better!" said the girl. "This is more like the thing! And now, Mummie, darling, do you really feel strong and well enough to bear the shock of a piece of news? For it's rather tremendous. It's rather terrific—"

"Eelin, what have you done now?" said the instantly frightened mother; she never could tell what this mad wretch might have been after.

"Oh, nothing much. Only this—I'm engaged to be married."

"Eelin—Eelin—not to that man!"

"It's to a man certainly."

"But—but—" said the mother, who unawares had been startled into sincerity. "Kate has just been in—she said Lord Mountmahon was in the drawing-room—only a minute or two ago——"

"Mummie, is that what you were afraid of? Then you might have been honest before," said Eelin—and it was a gentle form of reproach. "You've given me more than one sleepless night. For of course I had to think—to imagine—what your wishes might be; and also what others might expect of me. He offered me a great position, no doubt; and lots of our people are very poor; yes, I did think of it; though I've just been quarrelling with Lily Neile for daring to think that I thought of it; yes, I did think of it; and I'm a beast; and then after all I came to the conclusion that the scattered Macdonalds of Kinvaig, however badly off they might be, would not wish me to sell myself body and soul for their benefit.—"

The Bean-an-Tighearn's face grew very white.

"If there's one of them thinks that, then it's the lowermost of the halls of perdition for him or her!"*

"—— and then you see, Mummie," continued Miss Eelin, in quite a gay fashion, "there came along a young man—such a nice, biddable, obedient young man—no *attendrissements* if objected to—intellectual companion-

* This is the English rendering of a Gaelic phrase—which is not used lightly by any Highland person.

ship and no further—and there was a moonlight night—it was last night, in fact—and perhaps I was a little off my head—only, I promised!"

"But who is it, Eelin?" the mother cried.

"Who else could it be than Mr. Gilchrist?"

"That young newspaper-man? Eelin, this is too serious a subject for joking!"

"I am not joking, mother!"

"But that young man?" the mother protested, in rather a bewildered way. "Why, he has no name—no position—no means—"

"That is so," replied Eelin, contentedly. "We shall have to be satisfied with low living and high thinking—especially the low living. But then, to have married a genius! Earls and marquises are common enough, all over the country; but how many poets are there? There may be two in Scotland and three in England; and that's the very outside; and you have the great luck to marry one of these, instead of a common and ordinary person of rank or wealth; and you march along with him, side by side, to fame and still wider fame; and you find him material for his work; and you get to hear when his praises are sent back from Australia and Canada and America and India and South Africa, and wherever the English language is spoken, and you say to yourself: 'Well, I have done my little share.—'"

"Eelin, are you laughing at me, or are you out of your senses altogether?" the mother demanded.

"Neither the one nor the other, Mummie! Why, don't you remember the pride that Tannahill felt when he heard a country-lass in a neighbouring field sing his

own song, 'We'll meet beside the dusky glen, on yon burn-side'? What are titles, and honours, and heaps of wealth compared with a sensation like that? The titles are empty things, stupid things, inherited by any small-brained gaby; the masses of wealth are even more common and vulgar, you ought to be ashamed of them; but to know that ages after you have gone, this or that song of yours will be singing itself through the heart of your countrymen and countrywomen, and to know that whenever the poets of your native land are mentioned you will be remembered with acclaim and gratitude and affection, that's something: that's better than being a marquis or a millionaire. All of which, dearest Mummie, is out of an essay on Tannahill I am writing in conjunction with Archie Gilchrist."

"But—but—it can't be true, Eelin!" the poor mother said again; and then she added inconsequently: "Why, what could your reasons be for doing such an impossible thing?"

"My reasons?" answered the girl. "Look at me, Mummie." She herself went to the long mirror beside the dressing-table, and surveyed her not unattractive face and figure. "I am beautiful. I am noble-minded. I am modest. And yet no one ever asked me to marry him; and so, when this young man did, out of mere humility and thankfulness and surprise, I was bound to say yes. That's one reason. And here's another. The truth is, Mummie, I thought he might be a convenient harbour of refuge. You know, I wasn't feeling quite safe. I don't like it when a man tells you that he always gets what he wants; and when he has a gang of prize-fighters at his command. Supposing I had been

kidnapped: what should this kid have done if she had been napped?"

"Stuff and nonsense! We are living in a civilised country, and the things you talk of only happen in novels—"

"The things that happen in novels pretty often happen in real life; and what would you have said if your darling child had been captured and carried away into a solitary glen and starved into submission? Six burly prize-fighters: what could I have done? Suppose they had carried me up to a place like Stronelairg in the Monalea hills—what could I have done?—"

"Nonsense—nonsense—do you think there is no law in this country?" the mother said, impatiently.

"Well, Mummie, if there is any law up at Stronelairg, you could hide it under a four-leaved clover. Law? There's nobody to enforce the law! If a policeman went up into that desert he would die of laughing at his own helplessness—"

"Eelin," said her mother, "you are merely fencing. There is something behind. Tell me honestly now: if you think of marrying this Mr. Gilchrist—do you really care for him? Tell me frankly now, do you love this young man you talk of marrying?"

At this, self-conscious colour sprang into the girl's forehead, and her manner altered considerably. She came away from the mirror, and sate herself on the edge of the bed, and took her mother's hand and stroked it.

"Well, you see, Mummie," she said, with averted eyes, "there are some things it is rather difficult to talk about. I have a great respect for him. I consider him

a gentleman, by nature and disposition. And I have a great admiration for his writing: it's finer than he himself knows: there are qualities in it that will take him far: there are large qualities—a kind of broad, manly, comprehensive out-of-doorness in his way of looking at things—a wide grasp, you might say—a sort of straight fashion of regarding human nature. His eyes are open and wide and honest; he sees steadily and whole; the hot-housey parasitic kind of literature he simply ignores. And I think these qualities will carry him far; I think the public will recognise; I am convinced he has a great future before him—"

"But, Eelin, do you care for him?" the mother cried, in great concern—and even distress.

"Oh, yes, certainly," the girl made answer, though still with her eyes downcast. "Certainly. Oh, yes—in a way, you know. And the yoke is easy. It's all so vague and distant; nothing near, and definite, and appalling. And then he quite comprehends that I am rather a stand-offish kind of person. I apologised to him. I apologised to him again and again, and said it was no doubt a defect of temperament; and he was so kind, and so considerate, and so sympathetic—he seemed to understand so easily—and I was so grateful—and—and I apologised—it was this morning—out at the Islands—I apologised to him—and I couldn't do more than that."

But at this point she suddenly threw herself alongside her mother; and in a moment their arms were round each other: and there was a good deal of crying on both sides, but no very reasonable explanation of the whole state of affairs. The fit did not last long. Eelin was going into the town; and she could pull herself together

when she chose; and all she said when she left the room was this—

"Mother, be assured: I am making a marriage of discretion."

Nevertheless, as she went away along the river-bank, she walked with less of her usual buoyant stride; and instead of the Jacobite nonsense that usually filled her brain, there may have been graver questions, perhaps even forebodings; indeed so absent-minded was she that, at the corner of the Suspension-bridge, she was very nearly passing without recognition her old friend Mr. Allan Macdonald. Of course that could not have been possible had Angus the whilom water-bailiff at Kinvaig been with him; but on this occasion he was accompanied by a young fellow whose appearance did not happen to attract her attention. However, just as she had nearly gone by, some glint of sun happened to fall on the tall old man with the yellowish-white beard; and at once she turned, and went across to him, and told him who she was.

"Well, indeed, now, Miss Eelin, this is a chance!" said he, and he held her hand for more than a moment —while the young man retired a few paces to the parapet of the bridge and gazed over, perhaps on the outlook for a passing salmon. "For I was going out to pay you a visit; I was making bold enough to think that you might be interested in the news I have. And perhaps I was not right in that; but I have the news; and I was wishing to see you whatever, and to hear a few words of your voice—because hearing is easier for me than seeing——"

"I hope it is good news, Mr. Macdonald," said she —and she did not withdraw her hand.

"Oh, yes, it is good news, for me at least and no mistake about that; for I am old, and grown very selfish, and I have been wishing to spend the few of my remaining years in my native land. And what do you think my son has done—the rascal! You see, he could not very well tell me by letter; for there would be a third person getting to know; and the code we have cannot carry everything. But here is the young fellow who was my private secretary—and will be so again now, but I will get a good place somewhere for Angus the bailiff, and do not you fear about that, Miss Eelin; and Somerled, well, Somerled sends this young man over as a kind of forerunner and emissary, to explain everything that could not be trusted to either a letter or a telegram. And Somerled—But perhaps I am detaining you, Miss Eelin—perhaps you would rather go on your way—"

"Oh, please tell me, Mr. Macdonald!" said she.

"Well, Somerled, you see, he has the ways of an emperor—he sends this courier before him to announce that he is coming over directly, and from what I can gather he means to make Scotland his home now; yes, I think that; he will stay here now—"

"Mr. Macdonald, what do you mean!" she said—and he might have felt the hand he held trembling a little—"You told me yourself that he said this country was no country for him—"

"Ay, he may have said that," the old man answered her; "but he has strange ideas, the lad has. Shrewd and firm in business; and just daft outside. A strange fellow, Somerled always has been; but it was my fault:

telling him about the old places, and the old stories, and the name that he bears, and the loyalty that he owes to the House of Kinvaig. But—but an old man is apt to be talkative, Miss Eelin—and maybe you would rather be going on—"

"Please tell me, Mr. Macdonald!" she pleaded. "What is it he intends?"

"Well, then, as I gather, he has made arrangements to leave himself personally free from all the different enterprises—yes, and the Commission to inquire into the working of the Canadian Civil Service—they wanted him to take the Chairmanship—but everything—everything he has got off his hands; and Scotland is all his cry. Maybe it is done to please me. I would not wonder at that. It would be just like him: for he's a reckless fellow—the rascal! And now we are to take some place where there will be trolling on a loch—a good big place—and a good long lease—"

"But he said this country was no country for him!—why did he go away?"

"Oh, he had to go away, that I understand," the tall old man replied to her. "And then I kept lingering on here—I think mostly to listen to a word or two of your voice now and again, if you will permit me to say so, Miss Eelin; and then he has been making his schemes and arrangements; and maybe we shall find some place to settle in—"

"In the Highlands?"

"Ay, yes, indeed! Where else? But not too far away from you, Miss Eelin, if I have any say in the matter; for I should be wishing to hear a word of your speaking now and again, if you will be so kind to me.

And that is all my news; and I am sorry to have detained you."

Well, she said good-bye to him, and went on; but she did not go into the town after all: when she crossed the Suspension-bridge, she turned back, and took her way to the Islands—they were a solitary place at this time of the afternoon.

CHAPTER VI.

ON THE CASTLE HILL.

Now when Eelin of the eyes like the sea-wave walked into the town of Invernish, just as often as not she crossed over the first of the suspension-bridges and then made her way up the Castle hill into Castle-street; and on this particular morning, following the familiar route, she chanced to stop for a moment to survey the spacious scene—spacious enough, from the dim-azure mountains of Strathpeffer in the north to the duskier heights about Mealfourvonie in the south. But what struck her particularly was the extraordinary vividness of the objects right in front of her; the light was so clear and strong that the hill-side far away beyond the river burned a glory of green and yellow, and the small white cottages, no bigger than the size of an elongated lozenge, were so close that it seemed possible to her to stretch out a forefinger and touch them; while up the stream the shimmering silver under the weir was so intensely brilliant that she thought she could have thrown a fly, from where she stood, on to that sheet of glinting water. As for the heavens over her head, they had in them the blue of the north, that is to say, not the misty turquoise

of the summer climates of the south, but the deep, ineffable sapphire of skies perpetually washed by the Atlantic rains.

And so she was idly looking around—at the slopes and woods of the Black Isle—at the gleam of the Beauly Firth—at the dark mountains down by Glen Urquhart—when it suddenly occurred to her that a figure seated on a form just on the other side of the strip of greensward was familiar to her: and then, on the impulse of the moment, she forgot the bye-laws, she stepped across the grass and approached the stranger.

"Mr. Gilchrist," said she, shyly; and in a second he had jumped up; and it would have been difficult to determine which of the two was the more blushing and embarrassed. But at all events he had sufficient presence of mind to whip aside the batch of magazines he had beside him on the bench; and she accepted the mute invitation; and seated herself there.

"I am sorry if I have interrupted you at your work," she remarked, in a demure manner.

"But it isn't work!" he exclaimed. "You don't understand. If you knew the conditions of life in Struthers's shop! All this is merely amusement—delight: look at the hills—the sea—"

"But I am afraid I have interrupted you," she said, and she rose.

"Eelin, this is not very kind, considering our relations," he observed, gravely; and there was something in the tone of his voice that rather brought her to her senses. She resumed her seat.

"Well, after all," she said, "perhaps I may not be entirely destroying your time if you think there's any-

thing to be made of some verses I have got in my pocket. One of the girls in our house sings them now and again —Morag they call her; she is a girl from Mull; and I thought I would take them down; that is, in a sort of English—very bad and literal and commonplace, I know; but I fancied you might give them some proper literary form—you might make something of them, perhaps. There are plenty of songs about Mull; but I never heard this one before; and I am quite aware the translation I have attempted is most horribly matter-of-fact: I suppose I ought not to show it to you; it's only a servant-girl's song, after all; only, you might put it into shape, if you saw anything in it. My mother could have made a better rendering, for she knows the refinements of the Gaelic better than I do, but I did not wish to bother her about a trifle; so you must just tell me if there's anything in the verses that could be of any slight use to you— —"

And so, with some little timidity—Wild Eelin grown timid!—she produced the piece of MS., and Archie Gilchrist read this version of the song that the Mull lass used to sing in her exile:

I am thinking of the dear isle of my youth;
Sweet is the milk there, and sweet the breath of the morning;
Many is the mile that I used to ramble
In Mull of the hills.

There was the lad that my heart thought of,
John, the son of Red Hector of the Ferry;
But the big ship took him; he will return, ah, never,
To Mull of the hills.

And now I am living among strangers;
They are kind to me, but their faces are strange;
And in the night my eyes are flowing with tears
Thinking of Mull of the hills.

It is the loved home set in the wide seas;
Ay, many and many is the time I am wishing to be there;
Oh, my heart would burst within me if I saw no more
My dear Mull of the hills.

When he had finished, his lips were firm.

"If I have any voice in the matter," said he, "there shall not be one word altered. These verses are true. They are the real thing. That is the Celtic cry—like a sea-bird calling in the night—the solitariness—the remoteness—the passionate longing for home. The east-country people could not understand it at all; the Edinburgh fellows would laugh at it; the English—well, the English might suspect there was some quality in it—"

"Good gracious, Mr. Gilchrist," she cried, "you are cutting off everybody. Where is my wee audience to come in?"

"One Highland person," said he (for what will not a lover say in his mad enthusiasm?). "That is enough. Touch one heart. What do you care about fifty millions of Anglo-Saxons? No; but if one Highland man or woman, with tears running from the eyes, says 'Thank-you!" that is enough. And I will not alter a word. Not a word. That is the true thing. What about literary form? If it were put into literary form, the south-country people, the east-country people, the Edinburgh lawyer-people, would not understand it one bit the more. For these verses are of the West Highlands; they are beating with the heart of the West Highlands; it is not for other people to understand. That is what I say. There is the cry of the sea in these lines; they must not be altered. The people who do not understand—can go without. The people who are alien from the West

Highlanders—the people who can describe a Highlander as saying of himself 'Am I not a bonny fighter?' they are as far away from the Highlands as Milwaukee is; and who cares? But I say these verses have the real ring. There is the smell of seaweed in them. There is the north wind—blowing from Morven. And not a word shall be altered, by me."

Which was indeed a wild rhapsody about a trivial song: but then these lines had been pencilled by fingers which were somewhat precious to him; and she was sitting close by him; and also there may have been some kind of exaltation in the largeness of the landscape confronting them, from Fortrose round to the hills about Glen Strath-farrar.

"Not one word," said he. "That is the true thing. That has the Celtic cry. That has the loneliness in it. That has the sea in it—and the distance—and the passionate longings of the heart. As for me, I will not touch it; I know better."

"Well," said she, submissively, "I must trust your judgment, for you have read so much more than I have. But yet most people might think—"

"I don't care for the most people," he said. "I care for the one or two people who can understand. How many persons do you imagine have ever heard a sea-bird calling in the night?—it is a thing to remember. And I say this has the true cry; and I do not care one penny farthing about literary form: when you have got hold of a good thing, keep it—do not touch it—do not spoil it—not a syllable."

And all this tirade because these lines had been traced out by certain small fingers that he knew; he

looked at each word as if it were a sacred thing; Morag's nostalgic wail had become of extraordinary value in secret ways.

She rose to go.

"Good-bye, Mr. Gilchrist," she said.

"Mr. Gilchrist?" he repeated, reproachfully.

"Oh, well, Archie—isn't that more simple and natural? Good-bye!"

"But may not I go with you?" he said.

"Very well—very well," she answered him, "if it is not troubling you. But I have to call on Mr. Edel—and there may be a little time—"

"I shall be delighted to wait," said he; and so they set out together; and she was happily content, for there were no silly caressings—out here in the open, with the wide seas and the blue hills and the green uplands surrounding them. It was a literary companionship.

"And I want to say this to you, Mr. Gilchrist—I mean Archie—that is more natural, isn't it?—when you happen to quote any of the old Scotch songs, you should have the real version. Last week in the *Observer,* you had 'Maxwellton braes are bonnie.' It isn't Maxwellton braes at all! It is

> "Maxwelltown banks are bonnie
> Where early fa's the dew,
> Where me and Annie Laurie
> Made up the promise true."

And 'her neck is like the swan!' Good gracious, what woman ever had a neck like a swan? The original is more robust: 'She's breistit like the swan'——"

"Of course you know those old songs better than I do, dear Eelin," said he, quite humbly; and then he

went on: "Your mother was telling me you had a version of the 'Banks of Loch Lomond'——"

"Oh, spurious—entirely spurious!" said she. "Wretched doggerel. It is my own immortal composition. But would you like me to sing it to you?" she continued, for she was in a friendly mood, and there chanced to be a bench close by, just outside the Court-house. And there they sate down again; and she (with a preliminary glance round to make sure there were no listeners—and with her hands resting on her knees) began in a very gentle fashion

O fair shines the sun upon Huntly's green shaw,
And the mavis and merlie are singing;
And blithe is the bride as she steps through the ha';
And a' the kirk bells they are ringing.
An' ye'll tak the high road, an' I'll tak the laigh,
An' I'll be in Scotland before ye;
But me and my true love will never meet again,
By the bonnie, bonnie banks o' Loch Lomond.

It was a cruel thing to do—though there was no intentional cruelty in the doing of it. But there are some things a man carries with him to the grave. And Archie Gilchrist was not the first whom the tones of Wild Eelin's voice had wounded deep—to say nothing of the splendid April beauty of her eyes.

CHAPTER VII.

AN ARRIVAL.

Miss Eelin went into the railway-station, and walked up to the book-stall.

"Would you let me come inside for a few minutes?"

she said to the young lady in charge, who was a friend of hers.

"Oh, certainly, Miss Eelin!"

"For the one-thirty train from the south will be in directly," she continued, "and I've just heard that an acquaintance of mine is coming by it; and I should like to have a glimpse of him, without his seeing me. An acquaintance, you know, merely an acquaintance—that is the reason for my asking you, for there might be a little embarrassment if I were to meet him face to face; at the same time it is but natural there should be a little curiosity when one arrives from far countries——"

The young lady was regarding her with some concern.

"Miss Eelin, you are not looking well. Will you let me bring you something from the refreshment room?"

"Oh, no, thank you," said Eelin, with a bold assumption of unconcern. "The news was rather sudden, you see—that's all: only a few minutes ago. And the air is rather cold and shivery this morning, isn't it? Or perhaps it's too hot for this time of the year. I think that's it: too hot and sultry, for this time of the year, and one feels a little bit upset sometimes. And do you think that no one can see in here, as the passengers are leaving the station?"

"I will make certain-sure of that," said the young lady, and she promptly shut the side-door of the bookstall.

"I am so sorry to inconvenience you——"

"It would be strange if anything you asked for was an inconvenience, Miss Eelin," said the young lady; "and I am sure you are always welcome to anything we can

do for you. And I wish you would let me get you some tea from the refreshment-room."

"Oh, no—no, thank-you," was the answer. "I only want to have a look at the arrivals—silly curiosity, that's all—stupid and silly; but, as I say, I have just heard of an acquaintance likely to come by this train."

She began to tremble a little, for there was a sound of confusion on the further platform, and presently the first of the trolleys bringing personal luggage came into view. But whatever her eyes may have been doing—and they were keen enough—they were deer-stalker's eyes—whatever her eyes may have been doing, she maintained a brave show of indifference; she regarded each successive traveller as though it were his costume that interested her; and if, on one particular figure—if her eyes did follow—if her heart murmured to itself, "Ah, but what did you mean—why did you say this country was no country for you?"—nothing of the kind was heard by her companion. Then she bought some newspapers and magazines; and went out and called a cab; and told the driver to take her home by way of Inglis-street; she did not wish to go round by Church-street—for then she would be passing the Caledonian Hotel. She was looking constrained and perturbed; but she was not crying; nay, when she got out to Glengarva House she marched into the hall with her usual martial stride; and she was saying to herself—or pretending to say to herself—with some semblance of swagger—

> "Wha the de'il hae we gotten for a King,
> But a wee, wee German lairdie!"

But when she got into the drawing-room, and found her mother there, she said—

"Mummie, do you think a glass of claret would do me any harm?"

"My darling!" the mother cried. "You look ghastly! What is the matter with you?"

"Oh, nothing—nothing," she made answer. "There is something peculiar about the weather, I think; it's rather chilly, and makes me shiver. And I won't have the claret, Mummie. If you don't mind, I would rather lie down on the couch for a little while. Such strange things happen to people, especially when you yourself chance to be rather silly. Oh, I wish I was somebody else—or away anywhere else—or dead—or anything!" She had hidden her head in the cushion, so that the overflowing eyes did not show. "Oh, don't you bother about me, Mummie. I'm simply a terrific ass. I've got everything in the world I could wish for; and now—now it's the moon, I suppose. I wish I had a grain of common-sense. But such strange things happen—and you don't expect them—and if you're an idiot they upset you—"

"Eelin, what does all this mean?" the mother demanded.

"Oh, Mummie, don't speak harshly to me—just now," the girl pleaded, in pitiful tones. "A little later on—you can scold me—yes, a little later on I will take the scolding—for I'm such an awful fool—and I deserve it—but if you only knew—if you only knew——"

"If I only knew what?" the mother exclaimed, and she had grown very pale.

"I have seen someone—and it was rather unexpected—and—and then this weather is so trying to the nerves—it's merely the weather—it tries one's nerves—

it sets one shaking." And then there was a piteous little cry of confession: "Oh, mother, mother, I would to God I were dead—for now I know what I have done." The mother and daughter by this time were not far apart.

And then she rose and went to the window quickly, so as again to hide her eyes.

"Look, mother, look!—here is Lily Neile fishing the Devil's Kirn. Doesn't she cast a beautiful line! Fergus says I can cast as good a line as she can; but that's only flattery; I know I can't. She can lick my head off. But I can swim, you know; I can swim; and sooner or later I will get from the Devil's Kirn to the end of the weir—or burst a blood-vessel——"

"Eelin, what are you talking about!" the mother said, anxiously. "What was it you told me just now? Who was it you saw in the town?"

"Mummie, you wouldn't have me disgrace myself by mentioning the name of a man who never threw a thought in my direction? You don't ask that, do you? And besides, one has to be loyal to one's promise. I am engaged to be married: what have I to do with a man who never had a look or a thought for me?—"

At this moment a servant-maid tapped at the door, opened it, and brought in a large and sumptuous basket of fruit, adorned with maiden-hair fern. It was rather like carrying trees to Lochaber (as the Gaelic expresses it) but the intention was there; and when Mrs. Macdonald came to examine the card she read aloud—

"*With the compliments of Mr. Allan Macdonald and of Somerled Macdonald.* Somerled Macdonald," she

went on. "Why, that is the younger man—who was so generous to you with his thousand pound cheque. I did not know he had come back to Invernish."

"Oh, yes, this morning," said Eelin, carelessly. "I heard of it by accident. But of course he will be going on somewhere. He says this country is no country for him. Very well: it's good enough for the people who live in it."

The mother regarded the girl narrowly.

"Eelin," she said, "it was Somerled Macdonald you saw to-day."

"Oh, he was one of many," Eelin responded, in an off-hand kind of fashion. "I was in at the book-stall; and there were a good many passengers by the midday train; I just caught a glimpse of the younger Macdonald as he was leaving the station. I did not see him afterwards; for I came home by Inglis-street. And that reminds me, Mummie; I made a joke yesterday. Do you feel strong? Are your nerves quite firm? For this is a joke and no mistake!"

"You kill me with impatience, Eelin!" said the mother, derisively.

"You think I cannot make a joke? I tell you, I am making them all day long; but then the majority of them are so subtle that they are not perceived. And do you suppose the readers of the Invernish *Observer* will understand this one if I introduce it by chance into an article?—"

"Come, come, Eelin, what is your wonderful jest?"

"Well, it's about a Cockney sportsman who came to Invernish and wanted to have a day on the Nish—the

next day happened to be a free day—and he sent round to Mr. Watson the tackle-maker in Inglis-street for half-a-dozen Spey casts."

The Bean-an-Tighearn stared blankly.

"Ah, no," Eelin proceeded with a sigh, "I see that it is not going to be understood. It's so excellent and beautiful—just like me—that I shall have to keep it to myself. It must go to the grave with me unappreciated. This is a cold and a cruel world; and the best, and wisest, and most exquisite things in it—like me—are not valued at our proper worth." She turned again to the window, and professed to be entirely interested in the slow creeping down of the white boat, with the supple figure of Lily Neile putting a fly over the Devil's Kirn—though not with a Spey cast. Perhaps Wild Eelin's mother was not wholly imposed upon by her daughter's elaborate show of bravado.

Presently the mother said—

"I suppose we ought to ask those two Canadian Macdonalds to dinner."

"Oh, yes; I'm no mindin'," was the reply—the marked indifference of which did not entirely deceive.

"Eelin, what is the matter!" the mother cried, with tears in her voice. "You are concealing something."

And then the girl faced round.

"Why, mother, one has to meet one's fate and accept it. What is the use of whimpering? It's only cowardice to whimper—"

"And yet a minute ago you were wishing you were dead—"

"Only a figure of speech, Mummie—only a figure of speech. You see, writing for the newspapers leads into

tricks of metaphor—and—and exaggeration. If I blurted out some nonsense, don't you pay any heed, Mummie. At this present moment I am wishing I could throw a line as delicate as Lily Neile's; and also I am wondering when I am to make another try at swimming from Devil's Kirn to the weir. Do you think I can't do it? But I can. I was rather cheated the last time, for I took the wrong side of the current; but I'll subdue the beast yet; and there's not another girl in Invernish can do it. I'll manage him——"

"Eelin," said the mother, "it's not about swimming up the river you are thinking."

"And why not? It's a noble ambition. Oh, well," she said, "if you are asking those two Macdonalds, why not ask Archie Gilchrist as well?—he ought to be in evidence. And Lily Neile would make the party even."

"Oh, yes, yes, all that is simple enough! But you are hiding something. Eelin, what made you say you wished you were dead?"

"Because I was talking blethers! People say things like that at random—especially when the weather is rather depressing. But don't you be afraid about me, Mummie: I am not going to be depressed. You won't catch me whimpering. I can face my fate like other people. What's the use of whimpering? Only children whimper. And what you've done is your own fault; and you've got to take the consequences: and what is the good of whimpering about it? You've got to make a brave fight of it, without troubling people who are a hundred times better than yourself—and by that I mean you, Mummie. Why, look at this little bit of Heine that

I have been trying to translate: like my impudence, of course; bashing my head against the impossible."

She took a scrap of paper from her purse, and handed it to the Bean-an-Tighearn; and these were the lines she read—

Who loves a first time is a god,
Though he should be forsaken;
Who hapless loves a second time
Must for a fool be taken.

And such a fool who loves without
Response of love am I:
Sun, moon, and stars they laugh at me,
And I laugh too—and die.

Familiar as the original was to her, the translation seemed to agitate Eelin's mother strangely; for indeed this wild lass was the sole object of her devotion and concern. And when Eelin, in a heedless fashion, was going on to say—

"Now that is the courageous attitude; and then you must remember it was the utterance of a sick man——" she found herself suddenly interrupted.

"Eelin, Eelin," said the mother, in trembling tones, "what is it you have been hiding from me? Have you had two love affairs, and both of them unhappy?"

"Indeed, I have not then," answered the girl, in rather an authoritative and yet pacificatory and loving way, "Mummie, you really must not pay any attention to my blethers; but rest content; and keep well: that's the one important matter. What are my trumpery affairs?—it's you that is to be considered. Of course it is!"

And thereupon Eelin announced with quite a gay

air that she was going into the garden to get some fresh flowers for the dining-room table; and her mother looked after her with apprehensive eyes—and also with an aching heart, dreading unknown things.

CHAPTER VIII.

"SEI MIR GEGRÜSST, MAROSA!"

"EELIN—Eelin!" called aloud Lily Neile, as she walked along one of the shell-gravelled pathways of the garden, with Michaelmas daisies on the one side, and sunlit geraniums and calceolarias on the other; and ever she kept peering and asking with her eyes. But this was a large garden; and it was divided by thick hedges of holly; and it was difficult to say whether it was empty of human kind or not. So again she called: "Eelin, you wretch—Eelin—where the mischief are you?"—and again there was no answer. But at length old Maxwell came out from one of the dim-paned glass houses.

"What's your will, Miss?"—and he did raise his cap, though he was of south-country upbringing.

"I want Miss Eelin—I was told she was in the garden," said Miss Neile.

"She's in the ither gairden—through the door ower thonder; and jist tak tent, for she's shootin' wi' that fiery wee pistol o' hers, and naebody dawr gang near the place."

So Miss Lily made her way by the thicket of red and white raspberries, and along a path outside a forest of apple trees, until she came to a wooden door, and

then she boldly lifted the latch and entered. This second garden was an oblong and spacious piece of ground entirely surrounded by lofty brick walls; on the northern of these walls were trained nectarines, peaches, plums, and the like; while most of the long beds were given over to various vegetables; but on this particular morning it appeared to have been turned into a shooting-alley, for at the upper end there had been erected a target of wood, and on the target a bull's-eye about as big as a saucer had been painted white, with a black ring round it, while there was another black ring still further out. Indeed, the moment after Lily Neile had lifted the latch there was a ringing report; and as she knew that the shot had been fired she had no hesitation about advancing.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" said Eelin, turning round from her examination of the target; and she came forward in a menacing manner, "Lily Neile, I have a great mind to kill you!"

"What have I done?" exclaimed the visitor, in amazement.

"Why, for the last hour I have been trying to get six shots consecutively into the bull's-eye; and this time I had got five in; and I was dead on with the sixth—oh, I know it—I know it perfectly well—and my finger was on the trigger—and just as I was about to fire came the click of the latch that startled me—and I couldn't help firing all the same—and what's the result? The sixth shot is a good inch out of the bull's-eye, and my chance is spoilt!"

"Never mind," said Lily Neile, philosophically. "Give me a shot, and if that gets into the bull's-eye, you can

say that those in the bull's-eye are all yours, and that mine is the one outside."

"Oh, you cheat!" responded Eelin, indignantly. "But you can have a shot if you like." And she was about to hand over the revolver with its gold-mounted and richly-engraved handle when something made her pause. "I say, Lily, do you know anything about fire-arms?"

"Oh, yes," replied the other, with the utmost nonchalance. "I have many a time lighted a *pioye.*"*

Eelin shrieked with laughter at this innocent confession.

"But I know I have a very straight eye," said Lily Neile, boldly.

"Very well, take the shot, and mind you aim at the very middle of the white disc. A few yards further on you will find a cord stretched across: there you must stand. The next chamber is loaded—and so are three or four more; so you have another shot or two if you are not successful. Keep your eye steadily on the sight, and on the middle of the white circle."

It is not to be denied that Lily Neile received that gold-mounted weapon with a little apprehension, however courageous her outward demeanour might be; moreover she seemed uncertain about the revolver itself.

"Shouldn't you lift up something before you shoot?" she asked.

"No, no, the trigger will do all that for you. All

* The writer of these pages is entirely ignorant of the derivation of this word; but the thing itself is a cone of kneaded gunpowder and water, which, when set alight at its apex, fizzes in fine pyrotechnic style right down to its base.

you've got to mind is to fill this notch with the sight; and then keep the sight on the centre of the bull's-eye; and hold your hand steady; and then pull."

"I don't know anything about these new-fashioned things," said Lily Neile, fretfully.

Nevertheless she went forward to the extended cord; she had a look at the target: she raised her arm, and for a long time she was taking aim—Eelin meanwhile observing that the muzzle of the revolver was describing the strangest figures in the air. Then there was a loud report; and the same instant Wild Eelin knew that something had whizzed by close to her ear, ending its flight among the plaster behind one of the trained plum-trees. The remarkable agility she displayed in skipping back and hiding herself in the doorway was most admirable. "It is time for this infant to quit the field of battle," she said to herself. "That fire-eater has more shots to swagger about with." But nothing was further from the mind of Lily Neile. She came quickly along, looking rather frightened.

"What was that?" she said. "What happened?"

"What happened?" said Eelin. "Well, you must have missed the target altogether, and the bullet must have struck an angle of one of the bricks in the wall; and then it must have *ricochéd* down in this direction, just missing me and then ripping along old Maxwell's plums and nectarines."

"Here, Eelin," said Lily Neile, with decision, "let us take this blessed thing into the house; you know I believe I can shoot very well: yes, I do; for everybody says I have an uncommonly straight eye, and what more

do you want? But I am not accustomed to newfangled toys of that kind."

"It's a toy that can send a bullet through an amazingly thick plank of wood," said Eelin, as they set out on their return to the house, by way of an alley between apple and pear trees on the one hand and on the other a wilderness of currant bushes.

"Look here, old girl," said Lily Neile, "what I came to ask you about was this: are you going to be a howling swell at to-night's dinner, or only a middling swell?"

"I'm not going to be a swell at all," was the reply, "for the affair is to be quite simple and informal."

"You just tell me what you're going to wear, and then I'll know what to do," said the cautious Miss Lily.

Then the cryptic details were given, and the invited guest seemed content. The next question was:

"Is Lord Mountmahon coming?"

"Lord Mountmahon is not coming," said Eelin, with a certain emphasis.

"If he wants to come here, he'll come, you know," said Lily Neile.

"How?" asked Eelin, with the big blue eyes staring.

"Oh, that's the common talk about him," her companion made answer. "He doesn't stand on ceremony. He'll just stroll in——"

"And then he'll be pitched out, that's all!" said Eelin, viciously. "Why, there are two young men coming to this little dinner either of whom could take up Lord Mountmahon and throw him over the hedge into General Mallock's garden."

"Ah, but that's not the way things are done," ob-

served the philosophic Lily. "If he wants to be present at your dinner this evening, he would lounge in and call on your mamma a few minutes before seven; and he would stay on until the guests began to arrive. And then he would say: 'My dear lady, I fear I am intruding; I did not know you dined so early; or I should not have called so late.' And how could your mother help inviting him to stay and dine with you—especially when the gong sounds?"

"Is there no common decency?" demanded Eelin, with proud lips.

"Not where Lord Mountmahon is concerned," answered Lily Neile, coolly, "when he wants anything. At least so they say. It may be all scandal. I don't know him myself; and if all stories are true, I'd as lieve be without his acquaintance."

Then for a short-cut they crossed the drying-green; they entered the shadow of the grove of trees in which Eelin's swing was hung; they were still in shadow—that of the great black araucaria—when they came to the ivied red-stone house (with Eelin's honeysuckle bower half-hidden in the corner, and protected from the western gales by a lofty hedge); but when they emerged into the open, there was a fine brilliant scene displayed before them—the long terrace, with its limes, and chestnuts, and sycamores, overlooking the glancing river, the wide tennis-lawn basking in the sunlight, the garden-plots rich in their lambent colour, the gorgeous dahlias, the pale Marguerites, pansies yellowish-white and purple-black, petunias, begonias, fairy rings of blue lobelias, and here and there a few standard roses. And as she looked abroad over these joyous surroundings, she may

have said inwardly to herself: "And sometime I shall be leaving them all—and for what?" And perhaps, not being a coward, she may not have said anything of the kind.

That evening, a little while before dinner, Eelin went into her mother's dressing-room with some cards in her hand.

"Look here," she said, "Mummie. I've got the cards written out; and I have been trying to arrange the table; but do you know this that if you have a little dinner-party of six, three men and three women, and if you wish to have them alternated as they ought to be, you must have a man to preside at the foot of the table."

"Oh, nonsense, nonsense!" said the Bean-an-Tighearn, who was in the hands of her maid. "It's you who must be at the foot of the table, of course."

"Not to be done," said Eelin, with decision. "I've tried it every way. And as we must have a man, I propose it should be Archie Gilchrist."

"Eelin, what new madness now?" her mother exclaimed. "If it is as you say—if I must have one of the gentlemen as my *vis-à-vis*,—why not Mr. Somerled Macdonald?"

"He's a stranger! Whereas Archie Gilchrist is familiar with the ways of the house."

"Well, settle it as you please—and at once; for they'll be here directly."

And thus it was that when the guests had arrived—and they arrived almost simultaneously—and when the announcement had been made that dinner had been served, and when the little procession had filed into the dining-room, Archie Gilchrist discovered that he had had

an all too conspicuous place accorded to him at the foot of the table—opposite his hostess, in fact—and in great fear he was and trepidation. Nevertheless the general hum of conversation reassured him somewhat; and he found he had nothing to carve, which was a great relief; and wild Eelin, who sate next him, did her best to put him at his ease with her merry talk and her jeers and jests. And all the time he knew that both she and he were under the earnest scrutiny of young Somerled Macdonald—well, not scrutiny exactly, for there was nothing peering, or critical, or supercilious about it; it was rather the sympathetic and kindly observation of a pair of strong and steady eyes—the eyes of a man. And Archie would fain have had her pay a trifle more attention, and talk a little more, to this stranger from over the wide seas. But Eelin appeared to be constrained and troubled: when she did turn to Somerled (he sate on her right) and asked him a formal question or two as to the part of the Highlands he intended settling down in, Gilchrist almost believed that the fingers that held her knife and fork shook a little. But surely she had nothing to fear from the owner of those strong, calm eyes, that were so gentle, and that regarded her so gently.

Now this young railway-king who was conspicuous chiefly by his quiet dignity and modest self-effacement, and by the extreme deference he paid to the Lady of the House of Kinvaig, was not so far removed in point of years from the young folk at Eelin's end of the table; but somehow he seemed alien from them and their occupations and amusements. He listened with the most friendly interest; and his powerful, clear, steadfast eyes regarded this one and that; but mostly he was silent;

for why should he speak of things of which he knew nothing? Bicycling, for example—he could not understand why Lily Neile should be so fierce in her denunciation of lady-bicyclists. Well, no one at that table save Lily Neile herself knew the why. It was this. Eelin Macdonald, with her supple and muscular figure and her enterprising and courageous temperament, had a covetous desire to possess a bicycle; she envied the people who could go whizzing along in that brave fashion, out to Nairn or on the road to Dores. But she stifled this desire because of her mother's straitened means; she would not ask for the money; when she saw a bicycle in the distance, she turned away with affectedly indifferent eyes. Then Lily Neile got to know something of this. And Lily Neile had herself been thinking of joining the great bicycle-army; her people were extremely well off, and could have given her twenty bicycles if she had wished for them; and as a point of fact she had already fixed on the machine she meant to buy, with her own money. But as soon as she learnt or guessed Eelin's position, she determined she would not leave her old chum in the lurch. Instantly she swung round. Bicycling was most unfeminine, most unladylike. Did those women know how they were displaying their stockings to any grinning butcher's boy who might pass? And when she and Eelin were out together, it was: "Eelin, look at that girl in the pink blouse: that's an elegant stoop, isn't it?" or "That one has been to the wars; splashed all over her back hair!" "Why can't she keep down her skirts?—she might practise in the garden before making an exhibition of herself," or "If that elderly matron doesn't stop wobbling she'll run into

a cab in Church-street and have a fit!" All of which remarks were somehow and secretly intended to console poor Eelin for not having enough money to buy a bicycle.

Meanwhile the tall, white-bearded blind man and his hostess (on whose right hand he sate) had been discussing certain variants of words in the Gaelic tongue and also certain refinements of pronunciation; and into these subjects they at first entered with zest; but by-and-bye it became clear that old Allan Macdonald was growing inattentive; until at last he gave a chuckle of delight.

"There now, I heard her that time quite plain? Only a couple of words, but quite plain. Madam, may I trouble you to tell me whereabouts she is?"

"Do you mean Eelin?"

"Ay. That indeed."

"She's on the other side of the table from you, and a little bit down. She is sitting between your son Somerled and Mr. Gilchrist." Then of a sudden she thought she would exercise her prerogative as mistress of the feast. "Eelin," she said, to her daughter, "have you no news for Mr. Macdonald? I must not bore him to death with old Gaelic phrases."

Thus appealed to, the girl answered at once and most blithely:

"Oh, but I have though," she said, speaking across the table. "I have excellent news, both for Mr. Macdonald—and for the English-reading peoples of the world! You see, this is how it stands, Mr. Macdonald. Mr. Gilchrist and I wrote a little story. I'm afraid he did most of the writing; but he is generously going to

let me share the honour and glory. Well, then, we fell into the hands of an honest and decent magazine-editor, who not only accepted the MS., and fairly and squarely paid for the same, but actually asked for more! It may sound incredible; but blessed are they who have faith; and now comes Mr. Gilchrist, this very evening, with the outline of another story. He ought to tell you that story——"

"No, Eelin, no," said Archie Gilchrist, in an undertone, and blushing furiously.

"Shall I tell it to you, then, ladies and gentlemen," said Eelin, "pledging you to keep it a profound secret?"

There was a murmur of encouragement: she went ahead at once: they little knew what this performance involved:

"We will call the village Marosa. It is in Graubünden, six thousand feet up in the mountains. It is an exceedingly small and remote village; but it is not poor, it is rich, for it is a winter health-resort, and consists chiefly of large hotels, to which wealthy people take their invalids, along with their companions and friends——"

"Like Davos Platz, or St. Moritz," suggested her mamma.

"Davos or St. Moritz! Davos and St. Moritz are like the Alhambra in Leicester Square compared with Marosa——"

"And pray what do you know of the Alhambra in Leicester Square?" demanded the mamma, loftily.

"Will anybody keep order, and let the raconteuse get on?" she retorted. "This little village away up in these heights, has a silence that overawes you; when

you have left the last of the *châlets*, you get into the lone snow-world and the lonelier pine-woods, and above you are the solitary mountain-peaks, so that you think if you could only get up to the highest of them the next place you must find over you would be the folding doors and white gates of Heaven." She turned to her neighbour on her left. "That's rather fine, isn't it, Archie?" she said in an undertone.

He did not answer; he was too much concerned about the success of this mad experiment; for she was inventing a story out of her own head, with hardly any help from his sketch.

"Ladies and gentlemen," she said, resuming, "I forgot to tell you that this primitive little village hasn't a policeman within twenty miles of it; but at the post-office there is a telegraph to Chur, twenty-two and a half miles off, down in the valley, and also a telephone, and there is another telephone at the Restaurant Zehngebirge. Well, early one morning two gentlemen appear in the empty thoroughfare: they are dressed in an ordinary climbing costume, Norfolk jacket, and knickerbockers; indeed, you might take them for Englishmen only that they don't carry alpenstocks; they have merely a pretty long stick with a triangular bit of steel at the end for jamming down through the snow to make sure there is no hole below. Oh, yes, quite English-looking——"

"Brigands, I'll bet!" said Lily Neile, demurely, over her plate.

"Lily, behave yourself, or you shan't hear any more," said the narrator with a frown, and then she continued: "The two strangers enter the post-office and make them-

selves very agreeable to the postmaster and his assistant, asking particular questions as to the hour of the arrival of the diligence. The next minute they are behind the counter, each with a revolver in his hand. 'Cut that telegraph!' 'Cut that telephone!' 'If you make the slightest signal you are both dead men.' Reluctantly enough they obey; and then the elder of the two strangers says, in Romansch—Romansch, you know, that awful language that has stolen the unintelligibilities of all other languages and made a rock of bewilderment of them that an ox might break its horns against—'Dalmasso,' he says to the younger man, 'quick—off with you to the Restaurant Zehngebirge—and fire a shot when you have finished. I'll keep watch here.'"

But at this point the narrator stopped.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I'm awfully sorry to have bored you; I'll tell you the rest another time."

"No, no, why not go on?" pleaded Allan Macdonald: "An old man asks it of you as a favour." The truth is he did not care one brass farthing about Marosa and its good or evil fortunes; but his ears just hungered for the music of Eelin Macdonald's voice.

"Mr. Gilchrist, perhaps—" she suggested.

"No, no," said Archie Gilchrist. "Do you think I could build it up like that? I gave Miss Eelin the merest skeleton. And she is simply making it live as she goes along; it's wonderful—it's——"

"Very well," said she, contentedly, for perhaps she was as susceptible to praise as most young maidens of twenty. "'Worthy Herr Postmeister,' says the gentleman in grey, 'when you hear that shot fired, you may understand that the village of Marosa is in my hands, and all

that it contains. I have captured a village; and the question will then be of indemnity. If the rich people lay down a sufficient sum, perhaps we may depart; if they refuse, then we begin to ransack the hotels. The hotels!" he exclaims, rolling his eyes in ecstacy: 'Herr Gott, was für Plunder!' It is now only ten o'clock; you say, the diligence does not arrive till half-past one—oh, but what does that matter?—in any case, if it arrives, we shall simply capture the diligence also. So we have abundance of time to clear the place; and during that time I am Herzog von Marosa, there being no other constituted authority; and for the time being I must see that everything is done properly throughout my Herzogthum. Then we will all go away singing: *Sei mir gegrüsst, Marosa, tausendmal!* The postmaster replies: 'Illustrious sir, what you threaten is quite absurd. Why, the young men about the hotels, have they no revolvers? They would fall upon you two—you two—gentlemen, and kill you. Or if they were afraid, one of them would have a man galloping down to Chur, to bring the soldiers up ——' 'Ta, ta, ta, worthy Herr Postmeister,' says the stranger, 'are you drilling holes to put an ass's head on me? Chur 22½ miles—45 miles there and back—and the snow in such a condition—how long would it take to send to Chur? Do you consider me a stupid-head with your man on horseback and your soldiers?' At this point a shot is fired outside. 'Do you understand?' the stranger continues. 'My dear Herr Postmeister, Marosa is mine. I have captured it. I can do with it what I like!' 'Perhaps,' says the sullen postmaster, 'but if you two—gentlemen—go near the Hôtel Schafrücken—where the young Englishmen are, they will

kill you with the heavy blocks of wood they whirl about their head.' 'We'll see about that,' says the tall Captain Bartolommeo, and he goes out to call Dalmasso to him.

By this time dinner was over; but their hostess, observing the keen interest with which old Mr. Macdonald was following the story (or rather the sound of Eelin's voice) gave no signal to Lily Neile; so that they all remained listening.

"'Dalmasso,' he said to him, 'which of the hotels first?' 'The biggest of them, master, naturally: the Schafrücken.' 'Very well.' He fires two shots of his pistol into the air; and presently there comes trooping along the snow a gang of some twenty or thirty scoundrels, who must have been skulking somewhere about the road leading to the Furka Pass: swarthy, unshaven, villainous-looking rascals, armed with all kinds of weapons —daggers, knives, pistols, and even antiquated spears; and one of them braying shrill on a cattle-horn—'das Alphorn hört ich drüben wohl anstimmen'! This ragged crew follow their captain up the steps of the Hôtel Schafrücken. The landlord is summoned. He doesn't show fight: for he cannot have the hall of his hotel turned into a shambles, while there are so many delicate ladies in the building. And he refuses to have any part in a common indemnity: he says it would be impossible to induce the other hotels to combine; it would only invite a repetition of such visits until they got a properly-constituted gendarmie. 'But you will pay for this, Bartolommeo,' the landlord says, very angrily no doubt. 'And you, Cesare; you think I do not recognise you because you have stained your face, whereas soap and

water would have been a better disguise? And you, you one-eyed Demetri—and Carlo—and Lazzaro with the dash down his nose. Gentlemen, come in. Make yourselves at home. But there will be a pretty little settling up when the gendarmes overtake you; and the toss-up will be between a needle through your heart or a snake round your throat.' 'Enough talk,' says the captain of the brigands; and he and about three-fourths of his band go up to the first-floor bedrooms, rummaging and raking through the biggest of them, breaking open jewel-boxes, pillaging clothes'-cupboards, and searching the dark corners where the surprised people had feebly hoped for an asylum for their treasures; carefully packing up the smaller things in cotton wool and chamois leather; and sending the bigger things down to their companions below, who have to prepare them for the sacks carried by the three mules outside. And so they go through one hotel after another, plundering right and left, and not content with sacking jewel-cases, they make any likely-looking person stand to be searched; and this merry game goes on, no one daring to oppose them, until, just as they are about to leave the Kirscherhof, a small girl of twelve or thirteen, a German-looking little girl, with her long flaxen hair plaited *à la* Margarethe, comes up and stands before the leader of the band. 'Why do you do this?' she demands, 'I hear that the ladies at the Schafrücken are crying—yes, that is because you have taken away all their souvenir jewellery—souvenir rings—souvenir necklets—souvenir studs. By what right do you take away the things that are most valuable to them?' Bartolommeo winks at his right-hand man, Dalmasso. 'Well-born little lady, we are only

playing at being robbers. It is only an amusement—do you not understand? To-morrow we will return and bring back all these valuables. And may I ask who is the honourable little lady who speaks so boldly?' 'I am the daughter of the doctor who presides over the Hôtel Schafrücken; and I know if he were here you would not dare to steal these things. It is not good for anyone who interferes with the people under my papa's charge. And yonder he is, coming down the road.' The Captain Bartolommeo glances along the highway, and utters an exclamation. 'Little lady—little lady,' he says, hurriedly, 'is your name Hörtli?' 'Yes, it is—Agata Hörtli.' 'Mother of God,' cries the brigand to himself, 'what shall I do now? The thrice and four-times blessed doctor, that gave me back my Matta—la mia chera Matta!* But I will not hide from him. I will meet him. I am right willing to be shot, if they will be merciful to my comrades.' The doctor approaches; Bartolommeo steps out and kneels before him in the snow, and he clasps one of the doctor's thickly-gloved hands and kisses it, while there are tears running down his face. 'What is all this, Bartolommeo?' 'Pardon, Highest Excellency, it would not have happened if I had known you were living here. I thought you were still in Davos, where you gave me my Matta back to life again—la mia bella cherissima Matta, she kisses your name whenever it is mentioned among us. Excellency, what would you have me do?' 'But will you do it?' asks the doctor, severely. 'By all the angels in Heaven, Excellency!' 'Well, you must bring together all those sacks and bags that you have filled, and all the smaller things hidden in pockets,

* Matta—girl.

and must place them in the hall of the Schafrücken, whence they can be returned to their owners, by-and-by.' 'My comrades will be terribly disappointed, Excellency,' says Bartolommeo, doubtfully. 'But the Marosa folk are generous,' the doctor says. 'If they find that all their treasures are scrupulously returned, they will get up a consolation fund for your band——' 'And then, Excellency, my comrades must be very hungry after toiling through the snow—' 'They shall have a splendid banquet in less than an hour, and as much Sassella as they can drink—' 'Gott bewahre, Excellency!—that is a soldier's trick; and as yet destiny has not branded me Sciocco across the forehead. If you like, a half-bottle Sassella for each man, and then a little Gläschen cognac for the health; but no unlimited wine, Excellency; one or other of them would be sure to take too much, and then he would blab to the neighbours that we were making for the—the—St. Gothard—' The doctor bursts out laughing. 'Bartolommeo, you do not think Dummkopf is branded across my forehead either? The St. Gothard?—more likely the Splügen—hey?' 'Your Excellency will not send the soldiers after us?' 'The soldiers have not been summoned, for a very excellent reason; but if they should arrive, they will not get many particulars of your way of departure—that is to say, if all those valuables are accurately restored.' 'It shall be done, Excellency. Bartolommeo swears it, by the twenty-four angels that guard the throne of Mary the Mother of God!'"

Eelin paused for a second.

"I suppose that is the end," said she; "but it is probable that the people of Marosa—especially the hotel-

visitors—who had been rejoiced beyond measure at getting back all their jewellery, and souvenir-presents, and finery—it is probable they had been extraordinarily lavish in their subscriptions to the fund; for it is said that more than one of the band, as they turned the corner leading to the Furka (this was a blind, of course) looked back at the scattered hotels among the snow and sang aloud

'Sei mir gegrüsst, Marosa, tausendmal!'"

Here the hostess caught Lily Neile's eye, and all rose to make way for the ladies' departure. But Archie Gilchrist, whose frame was all tingling and trembling with excitement, made bold to call a halt.

"One moment, ladies and gentlemen, I want to tell you something. I want to explain to you that you have been listening to what you never heard before and will probably never hear again—a true improvisation. Don't you believe that I gave that story to Miss Macdonald. I only gave her the slightest suggestion—a rude outline—and she took it up, and invented characters, places, names, incidents just as she came along and wanted them. Why there was no doctor or doctor's daughter in the outline I gave her! I say it is marvellous. She never halted for a second; you would have thought she had known these people and their surroundings all her life. That is improvisation; it is a rare quality."

"Why, Mummie, what have I told you?" said Eelin, lightly enough, when the three ladies were passing into the hall. "I've always told you I was a tremendous genius!"

"Dearest, it's too great a strain," the mother said,

anxiously. "You must not do that often. It's all very well while you're at your desk, and writing the thing out, with any leisure you may choose to take; but to force your brain—and before a lot of guests—"

Indeed, Eelin of the eyes like the sea-wave looked rather pale and tired when she took her seat in the drawing-room; and when the gentlemen came in—which they did almost immediately, for there was not amongst them any unspeakable cub capable of smoking in the dining-room of a ladies' house—the murmured conversation was not prolonged. Then when Lily Neile's brougham and Mr. Macdonald's cab were announced, and when Mr. Macdonald had offered to drive Archie Gilchrist into the town, and when they had all gone away, perhaps the improvisatrice, unused to such sustained efforts, felt some little sensation of relief. But as far as Archie Gilchrist was concerned, the adventures of that night were not yet over.

CHAPTER IV.

THE GREEN WOMAN.

WHEN the carriage stopped at the door of the Caledonian Hotel, Somerled Macdonald handed over his father to the guardianship of old Angus, who had been waiting for him, and then turned to Archie Gilchrist.

"Gilchrist," said he—"but I beg your pardon; we are used to talking *tout court* out there in the west; won't you come to my room and have a cigar and a whisky-and-soda: there are one or two things of some importance—of great importance—I want to speak to you about."

Gilchrist at once assented, and his host led the way to a large sitting-room. He went to the fireplace, and rang the bell; and the waiter was bidden to go and fetch certain things—which were chiefly an excuse for the interview.

"Now, Mr. Gilchrist," said the young railway-king, "I want to ask you very bluntly and directly: I hope you won't take it ill; so much depends on your answer; and now I want to ask you fair and straight—is there any relationship between you and Miss Eelin Macdonald?"

At this Archie Gilchrist's back got very stiff and obdurate.

"Really, Mr. Macdonald, you must see for yourself that this is a most extraordinary question——"

"Man! man! don't take it that way!" the other implored—and the grave, refined, and thoughtful face was for a second full of a vague entreaty. "If you only knew the reasons why I ask, you would not hesitate—"

"Then show me your reasons, and I can judge whether I ought to give you an answer!"

For an instant a flash of fire shot out from the deep, steady, brown eyes. The railway-poineer was not used to be quibbled with in this fashion. But he had a strong will, and a strong command over himself. He showed no symptoms of annoyance; and as the waiter at this moment entered, there was perforce a short period of peace.

"Well, well," continued Somerled Macdonald, blithely, as soon as the waiter had gone. "We must begin some other way. I suppose, now, you wouldn't object to tell me if all those things they say about Lord Mountmahon are true?"

"About Lord Mountmahon? Well, that also would be difficult," said Gilchrist, who turned out to have much more of caution and firmness than the quick, questioning, authoritative Somerled Macdonald had expected. "I should not like to guarantee the authenticity of all the wild stories that have been attached to his name since he came to the Glengarva district——"

"Your own opinion of him, then!" Somerled said, impatiently. He spoke as one used to being obeyed.

"My own opinion of him? My own opinion of Lord Mountmahon?" said Gilchrist, with his grey eyes glittering a little. "Physically I should say he was like an undersized, overfed bibulous ostler, mentally I should imagine his ideal of Heaven was a music-hall, ablaze with electric light, and stuffed full of cocktails."

"I perceive that we are in line in that direction, at all events," young Macdonald said, slowly. And then again he went on: "And mind you, what I think of him is not based solely on hearsay. I have seen Mountmahon and that hellicate crew of his, after a champagne carousal of a breakfast, just outside the doors of Kinvaig House—Kinvaig House!—on a quiet Sabbath morning —I have seen them burst into a floundering, staggering Maelstrom of a dance, the men yelling and roaring, the women kicking their skirts as high as their head. A Sabbath morning, in Glengarva! And this is the man they say is to marry Eelin Macdonald, the last representative of the House of Kinvaig!"

"But he has not married her yet," said Archie Gilchrist.

"No, nor by God shall he ever, while I am alive," responded the Canadian Highlander, in a low voice, with

his features grown very pale. Indeed, he seemed extraordinarily agitated—he who usually was so calm, and self-centred, and tranquil of gaze. He walked up and down in his perturbation; when he stopped for a moment to utter one or two of his thrilling sentences, the hand that grasped the chair-back trembled and shook. "Why, man, you don't understand the circumstances at all! You people born in the towns of the north-eastern coasts of Scotland are only one sixth part Highland or one twentieth part; and when the story is bruited about that Lord Mountmahon is going to marry Miss Macdonald of Kinvaig, they will only say 'A good match, that!' But when the people in the West Highlands—the people among the hills, and the corries, and along the loch-sides—when they hear that the Last Daughter of the House of Kinvaig—'Eelin with the eyes like the blue sea-wave' I am told that is what they call her, in their pride of her and their love of her, when they hear that she is to be disgraced and degraded by submitting to a marriage with this notorious blackguard, there will be many a wild and indignant heart beating throughout the glens of Inverness, and Argyll, and the Isles."

"There ought to be some way of preventing such a desecration," said Archie Gilchrist, "and I think there is, supposing all were to turn out well. Now, Mr. Macdonald——"

"I was born a Macdonald, but not a Mr.," the other interposed, gently.

"As you will. But if you were to give me your word of honour, now, not to reveal the secret, I could tell you something that would make this situation a good deal clearer, and hopefuller."

"I give you my word, then."

"Your word of honour?"

"Is there any difference?" said Somerled Macdonald, haughtily: "I give you my personal assurance: there is enough of honour goes with that?"

Gilchrist yielded at once. The other man was too strong for him, even when it came to be a mere question of phrase.

"Well, I will trust you. Eelin Macdonald and I are engaged to be married," said Archie Gilchrist, watching his companion, who for a minute or so did not utter a word. "Yes," continued Gilchrist, with some anxious air of culpability, "you may well look surprised. And yet it was not altogether impertinence on my part that brought about a crisis. There may have been mischance; but not impertinence—you would not think there could be any impertinence on my part that brought about a crisis,—surely you won't believe that?"

"I do not," was the decisive answer.

"I hardly understand how it all came about," Gilchrist continued. "I think it was more of a literary companionship that she had in her mind——"

"But ending in marriage?" Macdonald exclaimed: his great, flaming eyes intent.

"Yes, I suppose so," answered Gilchrist. "That is the usual climax, no doubt, if all things go well. We did not talk much of marriage, I confess, nor of anything else, I believe: the witchcraft of the moonlit night kept us to silence mostly. And indeed I had no wish to speak; I had gained so much by my mad presumption; and then everything was so vague and distant; and who knows even now what may happen in the mean-

while? Influences one does not suspect at present be brought to bear on her mother——"

"Has Eelin Macdonald given you her promise that sometime she will marry you?" asked his companion, his eyes fixed on the hearthrug.

"Yes. I know no reason why I should deny it."

"And do you understand what those lines about her mouth, especially the under lip—do you understand what those lines mean?"

"They are very beautiful, at all events, and proud, and gentle: as much as that everyone can see."

"They mean more than that," said Somerled Macdonald. "They mean that she would have her hands hewn from her wrists before she would be forced to retract a promise given to her lover——"

At the word "lover" Gilchrist started slightly. It was all true, then? That singular relationship was not wholly confined to hushed homeward-going talks about "The eve of St. Agnes," while the wild red heavens laid breadths of a gentler fire here and there on the steel-grey bosom of the stream?

"Perhaps so," responded Gilchrist, who seemed strangely depressed and downhearted this evening. "She has courage enough for anything. But then on the other hand, she is extraordinarily sensitive; and if outlying relatives or friends were in the end to persuade her that she was doing an injury to the history of her family and race if she married a man who only the other day was a clerk in a hosier's shop, well, might she not bring that very courage to bear in tearing the contract asunder——"

"And then, you suppose, the fat little peer would

come sailing in?" rejoined young Macdonald, with his calm, steady, observant eyes. "Is that what is floating before your imagination?"

"Well," said Gilchrist, in a vague kind of way. "Mountmahon boasts everywhere that he can always get what he wants—it's a common phrase of his, I've been told."

"It is a vile phrase, a very bad and vile phrase; it leads you so often into the quagmires of mortification," observed Somerled, with a philosophic air; but he was clearly thinking of something else, for presently he said to his guest: "Gilchrist, for goodness' sake help yourself to these things on the tray—and—and please excuse me for a couple of seconds. I shall not be leaving the room: I only want a few minutes to consider a scheme I have before me."

And then he crossed to the window, and sate down in a corner chair, and drew towards him the Venetian blind, so that he could look out on the almost empty pavement, the dull orange gas-lamps and the dark fronts of the opposite houses, while from any inmate of the room he was quite concealed. He remained a good deal longer than the stipulated time, his clinched fists resting on the window-sill, his features, usually contemplative and dispassionate, now over-governed by a determined and haggard resignation. When he dropped the blind and returned into the middle of the parlour, he was full of excuses for his protracted absence; and then he said, in an off-hand way, as he took a cigar and lit it—

"Look here, Gilchrist, tell me this: I suppose the

Editor of the Invernish *Observer* is rather a person of distinction in this town?"

"Oh, yes, oh, certainly," was the indifferent reply; it was not of the good Doctor Gillespie that Archie Gilchrist was thinking at this moment.

"He would be considered to hold a good position—one of a certain dignity and power?"

"Oh, yes, certainly."

"And if he were of a literary turn—perhaps had done some literary work off his own bat—wouldn't one of the Universities be almost certain to give him an honorary degree—what do you think?"

"I think that would be highly probable. Dr. Gillespie, the present proprietor and editor, is an LL.D. of Glasgow, and his predecessor, Dr. Rennie, got his D.C.L. from Durham."

"But in any case, what I mean is, he would take an assured position, in ordinary society—one might make sure of that?"

"Oh, certainly," Archie Gilchrist answered.

"And if there were a public dinner, for example," said young Macdonald, with his still observant eyes fixed on his companion, "he would be a man to be marked—he would have a place of honour——"

"Oh, yes, yes, decidedly; everybody is anxious to be friends with the Doctor, whether for their own ends or not, I will not say."

"And even if the editor did not all at once arrive at the honorary degree, he would still be a person of consequence in the town?"

"Undoubtedly," Gilchrist repeated. "If it has any interest for you——"

"Indeed, it has the greatest possible interest for me," said Macdonald, with a peculiar look in his face which Gilchrist did not notice.

"Well, then," said guest to host, "I may explain to you that the Invernish *Observer* appeals to many interests and many classes; it has summaries of general reports for the Outer Isles; and local agricultural reports, and reports of town meetings; but above all there is the literary element that Dr. Gillespie has given such prominence to, and all over the North of Scotland the Invernish *Observer* has a *clientèle* on that score alone."

"Ay, the literary element—the literary element: it's a wonderful thing that for bridging over gaps in the social grades," continued young Macdonald, in a meditative fashion. "This very evening, out at Glengarva House there, I was saying to myself 'How openly and proudly she shows her favour; and yet Gilchrist does not in the least presume on it; it's an equality that comes from their literary partnership, that mysterious communion.' And then again I was uncertain. She is a merry lass, I am told. She likes to play tricks—but not that kind of tricks, they say: she is too proud. However, the situation as you now set it forth is simple enough; and I have sworn an oath that Eelin Macdonald shall not marry this swine of a creature, herself being unwilling, nor shall she be forced to consort with his abominable companions. You may say it is none of my business. And perhaps it is none of my business. But I mean to make it of my business."

Shortly thereafter Gilchrist took his leave; and as soon as he was gone Somerled turned off the gases in this room, drew in an arm-chair to the fire, stretched

himself out at full length, and, with feet on the fender, resumed his musings: "A strange chap, that: virile, shrewd, capable in many things; and in other things a mere child, an infant in the ways of the world, a spinner of dreams. The literary world, I suppose, the phantom-world, the world where people speak as equals; and that is why Wild Eelin permitted him the preposterous impudence of proposing to her. Well, she has made her choice; and that is enough for the rest of us; one must do what one can; and when I felt the pang of renunciation—that terrible minute behind the Venetian blind—God knows it was not about the handing over of so many thousands of pounds that one was thinking: surely not that; surely not that! But if the proud daughter of such a famous house should stoop to a perfectly insignificant person, then why might she not have done so to me? Had I missed my chance by going away back to Canada at the wrong time, leaving for myself nothing but the remainder of a broken life? That was a ghastly thing to think of; but it was only for a moment; a fancy so insolent, so unabashed, so monstrous, could only last for a moment. How could I have, without any encouragement—of which there was not a trace—how could I have dared to lift my eyes to such a height?

"As for this rotund rake-hell, this fat booby, Mountmahon—bah! A tap on the nose, and then he'd be bound to suggest a little trip to Calais sands; and there I'd spit him like a haggis; for I can do it; and it's an unholy size of a haggis he would make. But if he should insist on fisticuffs, I'm not so sure then; for they say he's rather clever with his fists. However one can only do one's best; for the main thing is to get this

young newspaper-fellow into a settled and honourable and distinguished position; and to get the mother placated; and the daughter of the House of Kinvaig settled down with a happy marriage."

And so he dozed and dreamed, watching the leaping flames of red and living yellow; and gazing down the twisted little corridors of gleaming gold and black-bound fire; until he heard, or seemed to hear, just behind him a voice which said or apparently said to him "What thou art thinking of doing, that must thou do." He turned, naturally and simply enough, for he was not a man to be easily scared, and found before him a woman —a tall woman with an old-fashioned dress in dark tartan, a large silver clasp fastening the folds in front, and with a Glengarva bonnet on her head, worn somewhat to one side, and ornamented on the other with a cairngorm brooch. The colour of this apparition, from head to foot, was the coarse bright light of a green railway-lamp gone dim; and momentarily it appeared to be growing more and more pale; until with the determined concentration of his strong and steady eyes he could just make out through the phantom the white lace and the damask curtains and the Venetian blinds of the corner in which he had recently been sitting. And yet the green spectre did not wholly disappear. He grew impatient. At the end of a couple of seconds, he pressed thumb and third finger into ear and eye; and pressed them firmly; and after a minute or so he released the pressure, and shook his head, and looked around. The wraith had completely vanished.

He opened the door of the next room, which was his bedroom, and proceeded to undress. He was not in

the least perturbed; on the contrary he was carelessly saying to himself: "When both ear and eye are deceived at the same time, it shows that the brain disturbance is considerable, and I should think in this case it was caused by devoting the mind too unintermittently towards a single object. But this one object, whatever it costs—whatever it costs, by God, for I have sworn that—must be accomplished; and then the *Bean-uaine** and *Iseabel Bheag nan Brecaig*** may wander away by themselves through the twilit woods, chasing the new moon. And as for the Green Woman, she was a remarkably sensible phantasm, when she only warned me to follow the course I had already decided upon."

CHAPTER X.

OUTSIDE THE LAW.

EARLY on the following afternoon Eelin's half-secreted summer-house in among the shadowy foliage had been taken possession of by two bold swashbucklers—two swaggering young braggarts they seemed to be—who wore a military costume or something pretending to be a military costume. White it was for the most part, though there was a peripheral binding of red silk; white linen it was, thickly padded across the chest, the lapel taken tightly over to the left shoulder, where it joined the row of gold buttons which went in a sinuous row from the waist to the collar. Under this short-skirted coat were a pair of loose knickerbockers, with hosen of ruddy-brown homespun wool, smooth and soft, and showing the outline of the leg and ankle; and finally came a

* The Green Woman. ** Little Isabel of the Bannocks.

pair of dainty shoes, chiefly consisting of two or three narrow bands of scarlet morocco, buckled over to a sole of crimson felt. A heap of warlike articles lay about —short swords, foils, masks, gauntlets, and so forth; and a basin of water had been brought, lest anyone should want medical treatment. Gay gallants they were, and perfect in all matters of equipment and demeanour; there was only one doubtful circumstance; any stranger drawing near to the delicate rose-tints and the velvet down of those finely modelled cheeks might well have doubted whether they had ever been caressed by a razor.

Meanwhile Wild Eelin had outstripped her companion in these preparations; and she had seated herself at her harp, and there was a soft and careless tinkling of notes, while half-heard even by herself she was singing some fragments of an old nursery ballad—

"And where's the ring that I gied ye,
That I gied ye, that I gied ye;
And where's the ring that I gied ye,
Ye little cutty-quean, O?
I gied it till a soger,
A soger, a soger,
I gied it till a soger,
A true sweetheart o' mine, O!"

Then she rose from her seat, and with a snap-shot half-bashful glance at the smooth-fitting hosen and the neatness of the scarlet-morocco toes, she said—

"Look here, Lily Neile, this is the most horrid wastry and extravagance! We could have gone on well enough with the old things. You can't improve your *riposte* by buying new gauntlets and masks—"

"My dear child, I wish you wouldn't bleth!" said

the other. She seemed to be a little peevish and disconcerted through sundry long hairs belonging to her moustache that would keep tickling her about the lips and also intercepting her speech. "The expense had been very little this time; and look what we should save if we were invited to a Fancy Dress Ball. A little alteration; and you could be anything! The Corsican Brothers, for example. There you are; right off the reel. Of course we should have a long white cloak to match, for the arrival and the assembly; a scarlet collar, if you like; and your rapier must stick out a good bit behind, you know, to break the falling line, and keep you distinguished from the crowd—"

"'Stand about, ye fisher jauds,
And gie my gown room!'"

cried Eelin, jeeringly.

"Ah, but there's more than that," said Lily Neile, nothing daunted. "For I've got a theory—"

"Oh, don't theo, Lily, there's a darling!" said Eelin, in a pleading voice. "It always does take such a time!"

"Stuff!" contended the other. "Now listen to me. You never do anything well unless you are dressed, and well dressed, for the part. Costume has a tremendous influence. You are bound to act up to it." Lily Neile was struggling hard to give a proper twist to her moustache. She continued: "I tell you, you can't play your part without having dressed for it, up to the last feather-touch. If you want to be in good form, be in good uniform. . ." She turned from the glass. "Aren't you ready yet?" she said, impatiently.

"I've been waiting for you and your blessed finicking for the last twenty minutes," said Eelin, complacently

—for she was a goodnatured girl—"and the result of your finicking is that you've got that precious moustache of yours twisted on one side; and your feints and your lunges will all be hard down to starboard."

Now the southern boundary of the Glengarva House grounds consists of a stone wall and a still higher hedge that separate the tennis-lawn and the various gardens from the open meadows beyond; while at the south-east corner there is a magnificent cedar-tree with a space behind it which can on occasion be made a perfect asylum for certain runagates. And as Eelin and her chief chum had managed to convey to old Maxwell's assistant, along with a casual sixpence or two, that he needn't be too zealous in brushing away the needles shed by the cedar, there was here an excellent refuge for them, and a soft falling-ground, when they were wrestling, or boxing with padded gloves, or flinging Indian clubs about their head. Not that there was an absolute certainty of their escaping observation on their way from the summer-house to the cedar; for even now, as they crept up by the black-green araucaria (moreover they had dark cloaks over their more brilliant attire) Mrs. Macdonald, who was seated on one of the garden benches, glanced up from her wood-carving, and called to them—

"What are you wretches after now?"

But they signalled to her to be quiet, and the next minute they were safely between the great cedar-tree and the stone wall and the hedge. There certainly was a little risk of espyal, even here in this secret corner, for just outside the wall and the hedge was the swing-wicket through which the rare pedestrian had to pass in

walking along by the river; but it is to be noted that people going through a revolving-wicket generally give their whole attention to the ground, lest there should be a puddle there.

And so, having flung their cloaks on to the hedge, they put on their masks, and began trying their foils, and making passes at imaginary antagonists; until they were called to order by one of themselves; then they got into position, they exchanged courtesies, and with an *"Allez, mesdemoiselles!"* the assault had begun: with cautious approach—with swift feint and lunge and parry—and with an occasional ring on the cup-hilt of the foil. It was a picturesque combat—the white and scarlet figures under the dim shadow of the cedar; but it was easy to see how it must end. Eelin Macdonald was simply dashing herself against the far more scientific guard of her opponent; her brilliant onslaughts (not unpractised either) Lily Neile quietly put aside, remaining on the defensive until her chance came for a lightning-like thrust. Then came the inevitable:

"A touch," Eelin said with resignation.

"No, I think not!"

"Yes, yes, undoubtedly," and by this time both foils were lowered, to give a few minutes' breathing, and to let Eelin crowd up again the disarranged masses of her shining black hair.

"Twenty thousand hair pins will never do this for me!" she said, disconsolately.

"Come, come," said Lily Neile, "we must show our ghostly audience, if we have one, that we can do something."

And soon they were at it again—Eelin hurling her-

self impetuously against her enemy, caring less about her own guard than about getting through that skilful defence on the other side; and, of course, she couldn't and she didn't; and at last came a little cry.

"Yes, yes, this time, Lil."

Eelin's left hand that had been high in air behind her came slowly down to her heart; for a second the right hand seemed to rest on her lowered foil; then the weapon fell away from her inert fingers, and, after a moment's wavering, she went heavily to the ground. Fortunately, Lily Neile had sense enough not to shriek aloud; but instantly she was down by the side of her friend, with her arms around her shoulders, trying to lift her up.

"Eelin!" she cried. "What is it? I'm sure I did not hit you—only a scratch—only a scratch—let me lift you up and you'll see there isn't a sign of the button —It cannot have done anything more than graze your sleeve——"

But Wild Eelin gave neither word nor sign. She lay prone, as if with her arms enclasping some deadly hurt; and Lily Neile, with a shuddering dread, asked herself if she must now run to Mrs. Macdonald, to get help towards carrying the wounded girl into the house. At the same moment one of Eelin's dark blue eyes began to open a little bit—the most tiny little bit; the long black lashes parted the least thing further; the clear deeps thus divulged were full of something, but somehow that something was neither piteous pain, nor yet appeal, nor yet reproach; all at once the conviction flashed upon Lily Neile that Eelin Macdonald was simply

convulsed with laughter, and on the point of becoming fragmentary in her efforts to suppress the same."

"Oh, you—you—you—" but in her indignation she could not find a suitable word—"you treacherous cow-herd!—to give me pangs of agony all for nothing! Well, if I'm not mistaken, the punishment has fallen upon you—and unfortunately on me too; for I caught a glimpse of a carriage—a yellow barouche, I think it was, going up the drive; there are visitors; and whether we cut round by the back premises, or make a run for the hall, we shall be seen either way; the consequence is that we are shut up in this hole until the honourable callers shall have taken themselves off. Q.E.D."

"Lil," said Wild Eelin, frantically—for imprisonment of any kind always seemed to choke her—"on with your cloak, and we'll skip round by the holly-hedge, and in by the kitchen stairs."

"Don't you know your own house, then!" exclaimed her companion. "Whether you cross the lawn or go round by the araucaria, some of the drawing-room windows are sure to catch you; and the most likely thing of all is that Jane is at this very moment bringing your visitors out to see your mamma; and of course they'll stay to tea; and of course we shall be boxed up here until they think fit to leave."

"No, no," said Eelin, hurriedly and plaintively, "that won't do at all. We must go straight up to them, and say—and say—what can we say? Lil, what can we say?—that we have been—that we have been—what can we say? Lily Neile, you're no good at a lie! Well, what is it?"

For she had been suddenly grasped by the arm; and

she found that her companion was staring towards the drawing-room French windows, that had just been opened by one of the maids to allow Lord Mountmahon to descend to the surrounding greensward. The two young ladies knew that this time they were thoroughly entrapped; and not only so but that they were bound to hear every word that was said, for the afternoon was singularly noiseless and still. Eelin pulled the collar of her dark cloak well round her chin; and gazed idly at the faint blue hills far down in the south; and tried to persuade herself that she did not exist.

But the very first words that Mountmahon uttered startled her into attention.

"You know, Mrs. Macdonald," he said, with a certain sullenness of tone, "I think I have fair right to complain of the treatment I have received from both your daughter and you. That's the truth; and there's no disguising it. I'm a plain man; and I like to speak plain; and I say I consider I have not been treated well. Done everything I could think of to please you—by Gad, I have—sparing nothing—leaving the shoot—and letting those fellows blaze away my cartridges and spoil the dogs—trying everything—railway-engines, now—my goodness, do you know what's the cost of a brace of railway-engines?—I'll bet you don't! And all the return I get is glum looks and 'Please keep off the grass.' Well, I'm tired of being told to keep off the grass. When I drive up to this house: 'Is Mrs. Macdonald at home?' 'No, my lord.' 'Is Miss Macdonald at home?' 'No, my lord': the whole of you scurrying off like rabbits into holes. What have I done to deserve such treatment? I know the common talk about me; and I know where it is

made up. Do you get your information then, from the servants' hall? Is your opinion of me gathered from the scullery? Refined ladies, who ought to set an example to commoner folk, do they consult the gossip of the ale-houses and the byres?"

He was drunk, of course; but the Bean-an-Tighearn did not understand that; she merely rose, and retired a step from him, her eyes fixed on the ground, while her complexion was white where it should have been pink and pink where it should have been white.

"My lord," she said, not without dignity, "I wish to ask only one favour from you; and that is the seclusion of my own house. I am not accustomed to hearing such language; there was a time when none would have dared to use it, to me or mine; but we have no man of our family with us now, and we are helpless——"

A passionate little cry came from behind the cedar-branches, and if anyone had happened to look thither some sign of scuffle might have been discerned. For on hearing her mother insulted—along with the pathetic confession that now there was no man to protect the ladies of the House of Kinvaig—Eelin had quickly unscrewed the button from the end of her foil, and was springing out into the open—regardless of any consequences—when Lily Neile caught her and bound her, and dragged her back into the thicket.

"Eelin, are you mad!"

"Is my mother to be insulted?" was the instant retort.

"To have such a thing in the newspapers—to have your mother's name in the newspapers—coupled with that of Lord Mountmahon—and perhaps a charge of

manslaughter. That would be a pretty tale to tell! Drop that foil! Can't you see the beast's drunk?—and we'll just have to wait until he goes away."

But there was help coming from an unexpected quarter. For his lordship, moved by a deep sense of personal injury, had begun to rail and rate again like a Newhaven fishwife carrying her husband home; and the Bean-an-Tighearn, her first brave show of courage over, had quite succumbed, and had sunk on the garden-seat, endeavouring to stifle and conceal her tears. Who, then, was this but Morag the Mull lass, who came rather late upon the scene; but when she saw and understood what was before her, and when she had been told that Jane had been sent off into Invernish for a policeman, with very little chance of intercepting one at that time of the day, Morag did not wait for orders. She strode across the space of lawn. Her small dark-brown eyes had a sullen fire in them; her face was the colour of a pæony; she was breathing hard; and there was a dangerous politeness in her Highland tongue.

"And were you saying any things to my mistress, sir?" asked Morag. "And now maybe you will say them to me; maybe I will be better able to answer them—"

"Oh, go away, you fool!" he said, curtly.

The next thing that happened was unexpected. Before he knew where he was, Morag had got one of her fists implanted under his ear, gripping both coat and collar, and she was dragging him across the lawn to the drive. It was of no use his struggling and twistling, nor yet his threatening and vowing of vengeance; the muscles of this blazing-red freckled lass were as the muscles of

a Highland stot; if he escaped throttling altogether it was the best that could be hoped for him.

"Is't yours that yellow cab?" said Morag, with the genuine Mull of Ross accent. "Well, come aweh, now, and we'll chist put you into it—and cannily, cannily, my braw mannikin—we are not wishing you to remain here at ahl."

What occurred now requires some little preliminary explanation. Glengarva House, like most of the houses in that district, has its kitchen and other underground premises more or less illumined by a series of separate windows, each of which has its own shaft for letting down the light of day. Again, each of these holes is capable on occasion of making an excellent man-trap; for there is neither fence nor rail around the top; while after a slope of greensward some few feet in breadth, there comes a sudden descent into a perpendicular prison about six feet in depth, and about five in diameter, while the window behind is strongly barred. Accordingly, when Lord Mountmahon, rendered furious by the ignominy of his position, had determined above all that he would not be seen by his coachman and footman in the hands of this virago, when his lordship was making the most frantic efforts to shake himself free from this woman's inexorable clutch, he had no knowledge that both he and she were approaching one of these treacherous apertures. The next moment both of them got too near the edge, their feet seemed to fall away from them, they both slipped down the stretch of greensward, but while Morag clung on to her mother earth as with the claws of a wild cat, Mountmahon went trundling into the lower portion of his oubliette, where

he found himself surrounded by a neat little vertical dungeon of stone. And curses are of no avail when a cell has no door to it.

Meanwhile the red-headed Morag had scrambled up into the open air again; and much surprised was she to find the grounds surrounding Glengarva House apparently empty; then she suspected that the young ladies had taken Mrs. Macdonald away to her own apartments; and in this conclusion she was joined by the parlour-maid Jane, who now came running back.

"Morag," she said, in great alarm, for this Jane was a nice, quiet, peaceable Scotch lassie, not used to such wild tilly-tantrums—"I canna see a policeman anywhere aboot; and we maunna have the mistress spoken to that gate. Where's—where's his lordship?"

Morag began to giggle; then she began to giggle more and more, and as if she were holding herself tight so as not to explode with laughter. She pointed to the aperture leading from the sward.

Then there was another volley of cursing.

"Dearie me!" said the douce Jane. "Well, we must get him out."

"I'm sure I've nae preen* big enough to get out that wilk,"** said Morag: she seemed quite content to let things be; there was a kind of obscure merriment in the whole situation: why should she budge?

"Maxwell, then?" suggested Jane.

"Oh, who ever can find Maxwell!" said Morag, contemptuously. "How is it possible, when he is for ever bummin around the universe in the body of David Haggart, the murderer?"

* *Preen—pin.* ** *Wilk—whelk, periwinkle.*

"The coachman, then, and the footman—his lordship's own servants?" was the next proposition.

"I am not used to speaking to any such great people," returned Morag, coldly: the truth is, his lordship had severely scratched several of her fingers; and she was in pain and extremely angry; and she did not care how long he was kept, at intervals bawling and yelling, in that stone cage. However, at last, amongst the lot of them, they managed to get Mountmahon hauled into the upper world, and conveyed to his barouche, the hood of which was directly pulled down. The footman awaited orders.

"Hotel—at once!"

"Which hotel, if your lordship pleases," was the reply of the deeply agitated person with the powdered hair; there were generally kicks flying about, and also sudden dismissals, when his lordship got into any of these entanglements. "Your lordship will remember there was a little *fracas*—about six o'clock this morning—"

"Oh, any hotel!" Mountmahon cried, as he flung himself into a corner of the vehicle. "What I want is writing—materials—do you hear—paper, pens, and ink—at once—do you understand. Do you understand, you blockhead?"

"Yes, your lordship."

"Gracious heavens, what have I done this time?" Mountmahon muttered to himself, as they drove off—for the wine had now had time to work, and he was getting into a more and more bemused condition. Nevertheless he was haunted by certain dark and unnerving recollections. "Yes, I have—no mistake—I have done it," he maundered on. "I have insulted a lady—by Gad, it's

true—one of the oldest families in the Highlands—insulted her before the servants—lost my chance with the famous beauty—not one within a hundred thousand miles of her at the Northern Games. I knew it was bad champagne—and I'll say so whether it's six o'clock in the morning or no—and I knew I should get into trouble with their vile muck. Never mind: let's stick to our guns, Mounty: never say die—and that's my motto. Not done for yet. Wait till I get that writing-paper, and the apology I'll offer will be about six inches thick. Oh, twenty apologies! I'll go on my knees—d——d if I don't! Too much to lose—too much at stake. Paulus must get me a stiff B. and S.—a devilish stiff B. and S.; and I'll go for something that will melt a heart of flint. I'll crawl on my hands and knees, that's what I'll do. A d——d shame it was. If there's a gentlewoman in this country it's that one; and I know what I was when I gave her damson-pie; for if I know what she is, I know what I am; and there's not a d——d cad in all this d——d country would have done such a d——d cowardly thing. Well, well, a devilish stiff peg, and writing-paper and ink, and we'll have a try yet. There's nothing they can dictate but I'll subscribe to; apologies fifteen feet thick; I'll swim in 'em till I can get ashore; and then I'll crawl on my hands and knees, like a retriever bringing a snipe out of a bog. If it was the mother, I think I could manage; but the young one she frightens me—staring at you like a bull across a gate. But you've got to pull yourself together, Mounty. Oh, don't you fear; you're fit enough and going strong; you'll be at the post! A stiff B. and S. and some ink and writing-paper; and the old lady will soon get smoothed

over. As for the young lioness—well, we mustn't try to stroke her for the present, if anyone has been so extremely unkind as to tell her the story——"

And with that he tumbled over on the other side, and was asleep even before they got near the town.

CHAPTER XI.

A PURCHASER.

THERE were the makings of a spate about. All night long the rain was heard in the trees; the sound of the weir rose and fell with the gusts that came moaning up from the hills in the south; daylight showed that the already swollen river had been steadily rising in volume, until now it was sweeping along in full flood, with twigs, leaves, branches, and bits of strayed timber racing and chasing and marking the swiftness of the black current. The hill-country was shut away from sight by lowering mists; the woodlands were steeped in vapour; the roads were running red; and the drooping limes and maples had no life left in them—they did not seem to be making any fight against this constant downpour of rain, and rain, and rain.

It was an excellent morning for anyone with indoor work to do, for example. Eelin at an early hour was bending her wave-blue eyes over the arrears of that literary co-partnership to which she loyally and assiduously adhered, though occasionally, for mischief's sake, she would rise from her chair and pace up and down her room, inventing taunts and jeers with which to lash that fell traitor "Fairfax"; but it was a morning not so pleasant for anyone apparently having nothing at all to

do but walk about the wet streets of Invernish, staring into the fishmongers' shops. However, this stranger was well enough protected from the rain by a pair of angler's boots and a long waterproof; while the firm outline and the sun-tan of his face seemed to say that he was not likely to pay much attention to the weather, in any case. And so he continued his idle perambulations; the calm brown eyes perhaps more absent than their wont, the fine and firm and thoughtful features apparently occupied by problems while the rain fell unnoticed.

And then once more he went round to the *Observer* office, and asked for Mr. Gilchrist.

"Any news yet of the Doctor?"

"None," the flaxen-haired sub-editor made answer. "We have telephoned everywhere—not a trace of him. Must have been swept into the sea, I should imagine——"

"It is impossible he could have gone away out to the links in this weather!" was the next inquiry.

"One would think so, unless he has gone headlong daft about that golfing of his—and sometimes it looks like it."

"But what do they say at his own house?"

"Oh, they won't say anything!" answered Archie Gilchrist, lightly (little did he know how deeply he and his fortunes were involved in these transactions.) "We have rung them up again and again; and once or twice they did answer; but now they pay no heed."

"That's where he is, then," said Somerled Macdonald, with decision. "Tell me how I am to find this View Mount—that's the name, isn't it?—and see if I don't get hold of your mad Doctor!"

Furnished with the necessary information, he left the

office, and made his way up the steep streets leading from the sorely-bedraggled town, and found himself following this or the other spacious highway adorned on each side with large and handsome villas set amid spacious gardens. Nor had he much difficulty in discovering the particular house he was in quest of; and with a quick glance round to block any escape, he boldly went up the front steps and rang the bell. If this mysterious and fugacious Doctor were anywhere at home, Somerled thought he had made sure of him this time, the heavy rain assisting.

There came to answer the summons a most extraordinary-looking creature—a lad or a man who might have been anything between fourteen and four-and-twenty; his head, too big for his body, resembling a gargoyle; but his eyes keen and sharp enough notwithstanding the general cowering of his expression.

"Is Dr. Gillespie at home?" demanded Somerled Macdonald, with a touch of his authoritative way.

"N—no," answered the caddie, who had been brought in from the links to lend a helping hand in the house, and who was not yet skilled in the art of plausible domestic lying.

"When will he be at home, then?" Somerled asked.

"No the day," mumbled the uncouth phenomenon.

"Oh, that is quite absurd!" the railway-king said, impatiently. "Not at the links; not at his office; not in his own home; will answer neither telephone nor telegram nor letter: what is all the nonsense about: is he drowned or dead?"

"Mebbe," said the gargoyle, with a sudden inspiration, "mebbe he's aweh by the steamer!"

"Away by the steamer? To what place?"

"Aw, mebbe to Edinburgh, or Falkirk, or one of them towns in the south," answered the lad, vacantly. "There's plenty of them towns in the south: I've been told that."

In a second the whole situation was changed. For by accident a door leading from this modest little hall had been left open, and as it gave an excellent view of a long and narrow passage—glazed, and ornamented with a number of potted flowers so that it might almost have been called a conservatory—and as by good or ill-luck Dr. Gillespie happened to choose this very moment for crossing the conservatory on his way to further outlying regions, it was obvious to everyone concerned that he had been "caught."

"You young scoundrel," said Somerled, "why did you tell me Dr. Gillespie was not in the house? I saw him this very moment!"

And the Doctor also knew he had been caught. He at once came back, smiling and peering good-naturedly over his spectacles.

"Mr. Macdonald," he said, "I have to beg a thousand pardons. I ought to have written to you and made an appointment; but I have been so busy—and am: look at this for a costume in which to receive visitors!"

It certainly was an unusual costume: a large canvas smock, strapped over the shoulders, and reaching to the knees; loose pyjamas of the same material; a wide-brimmed straw-hat; and much-besmeared gloves. As he also carried in one hand a zinc pail, and in the other a hog's-hair brush, it almost looked as though he were

some infant who had got picked up on Margate sands, and had been mysteriously inflated by a conjurer.

"And now see why I have to deny myself to everybody; and why I allow my correspondence to accumulate until I get this thing finished——"

"Oh, if I am intruding," said Somerled, and he was for retreating to the door.

"Not at all—not at all!" said the brisk, kindly, energetic Doctor. "You'll just come and look at my great undertaking; and we'll leave the railway confabulation until another day. Oh, faith, there's nothing I would like better than to have a slice of money in Canadian Railways—a young country—an ever-extending country—good credit in the money-markets; but, you see, small folk like myself must not let ourselves drift into the great financial tides; we must stop at home and keep nibbling like a mouse at fireside investments——"

"But, my dear Doctor," said young Macdonald, amazed, "you certainly have not read my letter. I am not come here to sell; I am come to buy—if it should prove possible."

"Well, well, well," said the Doctor, "we'll discuss these affairs afterwards. Come away with me now, and I will show you something!"

At first, when Somerled Macdonald, following his canvas-pinafored guide, entered a large, lofty, hexagonal apartment littered about with screens, ropes and pulleys, and various pieces of machinery, he thought he had got behind the footlights of a theatre; but presently he began to perceive that this gigantic toy had been built to enable a golf-maniac to practise his favourite games when the out-of-door weather was unpropitious.

"We're all unfinished as yet," said the proud constructor, when he had shown his visitor the apparatus for registering the force of drives, the sandbags ready to be changed into bunkers, the putting-green made of baize cloth stretched on elastic wadding, and the like; "and that's what makes me rather welcome a regular downpour of a day; there's no temptation to be off to the links. And you must not imagine we shall always have this shut-in and coped-up look; no, no; of course the windows must have netting over them; but as for those tall panels, now, that are only gradated planes at present, we shall have the perspective of landscape put into them—the shadowy hills of the north—a sweep of sea, perhaps, and a line of distant shore. I mean to levy toll on every one of those young artist fellows who come through this way: when the weather is too bad for their own work out-of-doors, they'll just come in here and paint me a panel—early morning on the links—a wild sea off Burghead—anything—anything—only it must be faint and remote, and full of air. For my own part, I confine myself to the bunkers; on these one can give oneself a free hand. And yet—yet—not without a touch of suggestion—of romanticism—as one might say." The Doctor was regarding one of the horizontal lengths of canvas with quite a professional eye. "You see the whin bushes there?"

"Yes," answered Somerled, boldly; for at least he could make out some streaky masses of blue-grey that might as well be whin-bushes as anything else.

"Now I am going to try a bit of glorification, as they call it," observed the good Doctor, and he took up the zinc pail, and the hog's hair brush, and began mix-

ing up a viscous sort of fluid of a dull saffron-yellow hue. And then he proceeded to dab little dots here and there; and then more little dots, looking as like furze-blossom as anyone could reasonably expect; but when he came to the crests his decorative enthusiasm ran away with him, and he made of these an almost continuous blaze of golden fire. Because it is strength of effect, it is not refinement of atmosphere, that one wants when one is painting bunkers.

"Capital! Capital! Excellent! First-rate!" called out Somerled; for why should not he constitute himself an art critic as well as another?

The painter retired a step or two, obviously pleased with his work.

"At all events," said he, modestly, "it will give them a clear idea of what they've to get over when they're attempting a short pitch. And now, Mr. Macdonald, let me apologise to you once more for keeping you waiting, and place myself at your service. I confess I was anxious to try the effect," continued the Doctor, and he glanced back, not without complacency, at the whin-bushes.

"But isn't this rather an open place for a business talk?" the younger Macdonald suggested; it certainly was unlike the private apartments in a banker's palace in Montreal or Toronto.

"Oh, not in the least," the Doctor replied cheerfully. "That monstrous-headed Cerberus of a caddie will drive away everybody from the front door—it was a remarkable fluke your catching a glimpse of me—and the lasses of the house are no fond of bringing their skirts in among

zinc pails to get themselves soused with the colours of Joseph's coat."

"Oh, very well," said Somerled—who could see that the Doctor was loth to tear himself away from his landscape triumph. "I shall not waste much of your time. Few words are best, in business affairs. And so —if it is not impertinent, Doctor—I would like to ask you if the Invernish *Observer* is a purchasable commodity."

The gold-rimmed spectacles seemed to grow larger. What could he mean? Of course, the *Observer* was purchasable—one penny, weekly. But did this brazen-faced young Canadian—no matter what his wealth might be, or that of his father—did he want to know what bribe the Invernish *Observer* would take for advertising all over the North of Scotland the latest of his railway enterprises?

"Yes," said Somerled, quite simply. "Hasn't it ever occurred to you that you might wish to part with the paper, and devote your well-earned leisure to poetry and golf? And naturally you must have speculated as to the marketable value of the property. In short, Dr. Gillespie, if you are willing to sell the Invernish *Observer* and if the sum is reasonable, I will buy it—and you shall name the valuator."

The Doctor stared at this young man. There could be no doubt as to his seriousness. The calm brown eyes were as outspoken as ever in their grave and honest glance; the thoughtfulness of his features—that kind of quick, appreciative thoughtfulness that robs a keen and firm face of much of its outward austerity—was as much in evidence as ever. And yet here he was

offering to buy the Invernish *Observer*—founded in 1836—one of the most influential journals in the North and West of Scotland—as if it had been a pennyworth of barley-sugar!

"God bless my soul!" exclaimed the Doctor. "That is a large proposition, in so small a nutshell. And, as you say, this is too open a place for serious business talk. Come away into the dining-room, my dear Sir; and if you'll give me a couple of seconds I'll change into more respectable clothing. For I'll not deny but that I have sometimes thought of retiring from editorial responsibilities, and enjoying the fruits of many years of labour; and of course if I were to part with the newspaper, it would be to one who could afford, like yourself, to keep up its good name and standing. However, one moment—just one moment—"

He went back to the pail, and took the brush, and administered a few final and critical touches to the furze-blossom, advancing and retiring to observe the effect. Perhaps this was cunningly to intimate to his visitor that he was after all not so very anxious to sell; perhaps it arose out of genuine artistic faith: who can determine? What happened after this brief delay was that he showed Somerled into the adjacent dining-room; and put a decanter of port and a decanter of sherry on the table, along with a couple of old-fashioned glasses and a silver basket containing shortbread and biscuits; then he hastened away to alter his attire; and in a minute or two he was back again, all suavity, and politeness, and profound and artful diplomacy.

But the good Doctor's wily dispositions were all thrown away upon this young man, who spoke so simply

and clearly to the point, and whose contemplative dark eyes, though they were never in a hurry, seemed somehow to anticipate what his companion had to say. First of all this younger of the two Macdonalds had to explain that he did not bind himself to accept any valuation; he only asked in the meantime for some rough guess as to the possible price, that he might know whether a certain project of his came within the sphere of practical politics; thereafter, if there was a probability of their agreeing about terms, the whole affair of the transference would be handed over in due course to the lawyers, to let them work their wicked wills.

"You're not thinking of the county?" said the Doctor, of a sudden, looking up. "For I should warn you that Sir Robert is considered to have a perfectly safe seat."

"No, no," replied the younger man, indifferently. "I have no ambitions that way. I don't even know what your politics are: I suppose they chiefly consist in badgering the Government for more grants. In any case, after the end of this week, I do not think I shall trouble Invernish or Invernish-shire much more."

"Leaving us? And yet you want to become the owner of the Invernish *Observer!*" cried the proprietor and editor of that excellent paper.

"I may tell you what my scheme is a little later on," said Somerled Macdonald—who appeared unusually self-absorbed this morning; his rapid perceptions seemed a bit dulled somehow; perhaps he was thinking of something else besides the estimated value of the newspaper. And then he made an effort to recall himself.

"Come, come, Dr. Gillespie," said he, "if you have ever thought of selling the *Observer,* you must have

formed some kind of conjecture as to its worth as a property. And a very rough guess would be sufficient for me, at present."

The Doctor went and got some writing-paper, drew in a chair to the table, and pulled out his little gold pencil, and presently was deep—or pretended to be deep—in figures. When, some quarter of an hour or so thereafter, Somerled Macdonald splashed out into the wet again, he knew that at any moment—or as soon as the lawyers had performed their grave antics around the process—he could become the proprietor of the Invernish *Observer.*

And then he walked back along the wooded heights until he came to the Castle hill, and there he entered the enclosure, and went forward and seated himself on a wooden bench, overlooking the wide and smurred and dismal landscape—the uplands half-hidden in the mists—the Cathedral and its twin towers down by the river—scattered villas and gardens—the suspension bridges—the roaring black current with its whirling scraps of green twig. It still poured. Now and again a faint, mysterious light—an almost imperceptible glow—would stealthily appear among the hills about Glen Urquhart, and then there was almost a hope of the sun breaking through in the south; while far away in the north twisted wreaths of vapour would begin to ascend, revealing the lower slopes of the Ben Wyvis mountains, until one vainly sought for a glimpse of the higher aerial blue; then gradually and slowly the weighty masses of cloud deepened and pressed down once more, and the relentless rain resumed, hissing on the dark swing of the flood. It was a sombre and phantasmal world, and a world ap-

parently quite devoid of life or colour, save for one small speck of orange that moved quickly along on the other side of the stream, past the Cathedral and under the great range of elms. The tiny flame-like atom that thus steadily made its way through the gloomy landscape was a carriage; and if Somerled Macdonald had been better acquainted with the features of this district he might have known it was Lord Mountmahon's yellow barouche—now on the road leading out to Glengarva House. In fact, he paid no attention to it; he was more engaged with those twisting vapours that were wreathing their grey folds round the lower corries of Ben Wyvis; and he may have been thinking that if that lofty region seemed sufficiently ghostly and remote, there was one still more solitary and lonely, one still further away in the isolation of the north, that would in a few days' time now receive and shut off from the rest of the world his father and himself. But before leaving for the solitudes of the shores of Alt-na-Traive, he would of course have to go out and say a last good-bye to Eelin Macdonald, for whom, this very morning, he had just been purchasing—or preparing to purchase—a little wedding-present.

CHAPTER XII.

A DEED OF GIFT.

On the evening previous to their departure for the north the Canadian Macdonalds entertained at dinner the two ladies of Glengarva House, their only other guests being Archie Gilchrist and Dr. Gillespie. Somerled had secured a suite of rooms on the first floor of the hotel;

he had ransacked the town for little prettinesses of decoration; extra waiters had been sent through from Edinburgh; and Covent Garden was responsible for the fruit and flowers. The tall old blind man was eagerly excited about these various preparations; all the more so that it was only through the ear that he could learn how they were going forward.

"Spare nothing, Lad," he would insist, "spare nothing. It is a great honour they are doing us. Let them see that we are sensible of it."—And this to Somerled Macdonald, of all people in the wide world!

Archie Gilchrist was the first to arrive; and he was almost immediately followed by Dr. Gillespie, who was acting as usher to the two ladies whom he had found in the hall below. Alas! when Gilchrist, who had hung back a little, saw Eelin Macdonald enter this reception-room—so smiling and radiant she was—glancing a friendly recognition to this one, and with a kindly word for that—his heart sank within him. She was so far away from him—so unattainable—so unapproachable: he and she might be engaged lovers, but worlds lay between them none the less. Why, even the subdued splendour of her costume—of a pale canary-coloured silk it was, with the close chiffon sleeves ending in a little fringe half-way over the hand—even that impressed him with a sense of distance. That was not the kind of attire worn by the people among whom he had been brought up. She seemed a being come from some other region altogether—lustrous—commanding—all-conquering; though, to be sure, when she came up to him and shook hands with him, there was a sort of girlish shyness in her look and a tinge of colour in her forehead. And then, after a few

minutes of murmured conversation, dinner was announced; and Somerled Macdonald, giving his arm to the younger of the two ladies, led the way into the dining-room, taking his position at the foot of the table, while his father and the Bean-an-Tighearn passed along to the head. The seats had been skilfully arranged. Archie Gilchrist and Eelin Macdonald found themselves right opposite each other, so that they could interchange word or jest or assenting nod, just as they liked; while as for Somerled himself, who was conscious of being rather a dull and stupid person (though with a certain capacity in his own business, perhaps) he had placed himself at the lower end of the table, so that he could be left out of the talk without much notice being taken.

And indeed at this end of the banqueting-board there was at first a certain measure of vague and ill-defined constraint. It was a farewell evening, no doubt; and yet three young people sitting down to dinner need not have been so repressed—so afraid of each other, as a stranger might have imagined. Their elders up there had immediately started a discussion on the news just received from Ottawa—and not very good news either—about the crofters' settlements in the North West Territory and about the possibility of the British Government coming to their aid; but the younger people, who ought to have been the liveliest of the company—what were they about? Now and again Somerled would offer some little remark, rather implying that he was listening to the elder folk; but for the most part he was silent; and then it was that Eelin felt rather than knew that his eyes were covertly fixed on her. Friendly eyes they were, and sincere and kind; but once or twice that she caught

him thus regarding her there was a sort of wistfulness in his expression that somewhat startled her. She grew nervous; the air at this end of the room seemed charged with electricity; and then again her proud spirit at all times chafed against surveillance, no matter how respectful and distant it might be. And at length she suddenly turned to Archie Gilchrist, and addressed him across the table.

"Oh, Mr. Gilchrist," said she, with quite a gay air, "did you ever hear about Lily Neile's sparrow?"

Archie Gilchrist looked up gladly enough; he had never heard of Miss Neile's sparrow; in truth, he did not believe in the existence of any such creature; for he knew that Eelin, when she was inventing romantic tales of the animal world, generally claimed as her authority her chief friend and companion. And at this same moment there was silence at the upper end of the table; for old Allan Macdonald, hearing the sound of Eelin's voice, instantly ceased talking about the High Commissioner and the mismanaged crofts.

"A sparrow, did you say?" he called to her.

"Oh, Mr. Macdonald, don't encourage her!" her mother protested. "I know it is some outrageous piece of nonsense—I can see it in her face."

"Well, then, it isn't!" said Eelin, valiantly. "Why, you can judge for yourself! You can always tell whether a story is true by the details. Are they probable? Do they fit? And that's what they call *vraisemblance*. Now, Dr. Gillespie, there is no *vraisemblance* about the stories you print in the *Observer*—sent you from outlying districts—about lambs with ten legs—and similar stuff——"

"My dear young lady, my sub-editors are responsible

for all such things," the Doctor exclaimed. "Ask Mr. Gilchrist there to cut off as many of the lamb's legs as you please——"

"Now listen to what happened to Lily Neile," she said, imperiously. "Pay attention to the details; see whether they fit; whether there's *vraisemblance;* and if you don't believe, then write to the editor of the *Spectator,* and he'll confirm every word—by means of intuition. That's another thing, you know. You ought to have intuition—before you can decide upon the truth of a story. However, this is it. Just at the end of last winter, you may recollect, there was a spell of very hard weather—everything frozen up; and one morning Lily Neile and her cousin Barbara were going into the town, and they had just shut the door behind them, when Lily saw on the lawn beside the drive a sparrow that was acting in a very singular manner. It was lying on its back, and was kicking with its feet, while its wings seemed all awry and stiff, and yet not quite motionless, for they could flutter the least little bit. 'Oh, Lily,' says Barbara, 'it's dying of cold; what are we to do?' Well, Lily Neile is a very practical sort of girl, I should have told you. She stepped out on to the grass, and took up the sparrow, and tried to smooth its wings, and then she put it into her snug muff, and carried it gently back into the house. And there they set to revive it, and coddle it—lukewarm milk, at first, and then softened crumbs, on the hearthrug in front of the fire; and it was quite marvellous how quickly it came to. They thought of making a tame sparrow of it, now that it knew they would treat it kindly; but Barbara, being a thoughtful sort of girl, said that it ought to have its choice, so she

opened the window, and put the sparrow on the sill, to see whether it would go or stay. It may have been grateful or it may not; at all events, after a little preening of its feathers away it flew, as merry as a grig."

She looked round.

"So far the Court is with you," said the Doctor, but not without suspicion—for he knew this young lady.

"Ah, but that is just what I wanted you to admit!" she returned, triumphantly. "You confess that the details are probable; that there is what the critics call *vraisemblance;* that the story carries conviction with it; in short, that it is true. That is all I want you to admit; for of course you can't deny that a story that is true one day may be equally true the next. Yes," she observed, calmly. "Next day the same sparrow came and played its antics on the lawn; and again it was taken indoors and coddled and petted, until it had had enough of lukewarm crumbs and milk: and then again it flew away. That's all right. That's easily intelligible. When a sparrow has once successfully shammed being frozen, it will naturally repeat the performance, so long as there's food to be got by it and coddling. But how that sparrow could teach a number of its mates to play the same game—or whether it was merely imitation on their part—but to see that lawn with six or eight sparrows fluttering and kicking on their back whenever Lily Neile made her appearance at the door—"

"Eelin, for shame!" her mother cried; but Archie Gilchrist looked up, and said gravely—

"Oh, but that story must be true, for it is so excellent an illustration of the doctrine of evolution. Undoubtedly—undoubtedly——"

And then the moment she had found an ally she was off into other fields of nonsense and natural history and pseudo-science; and she reasoned with her elders about their unbelief, and chided them; and always, whatever were her arguments or her assertions, she looked across the table, to Archie Gilchrist, for corroboration. Yes, it was all very entertaining, and fascinating, and mischievously bewildering—her youthful gaiety and audacity—the sharp cleverness of her retorts and her laughing quips and merriments; nevertheless (had they but known it) it was all too dangerously near to tears. She professed to address herself mainly to Gilchrist; but she was conscious the while that a pair of calm and observant eyes—sincere, earnest, and not unkindly in their transparent brown deeps—were regarding her. And then, unexpectedly finding an opportunity, she turned from these idle diversions; and she said—perhaps a little proudly—to Somerled Macdonald—

"Why are you going to Alt-na-Traive? I hear you have taken a place there. And yet I thought you said this country was no country for you."

"You still keep up that phrase against me?" he said, with a smile. "Yet I only suggested to my father that there was too much of magic and romance in the atmosphere of these regions for an ordinary person who wanted to keep his head clear of dreams."

"Why do you go at the end of the season?" she asked again. "All the shooting and fishing tenants will be making for the south very soon now. And the winter—what will you do in the dullness of the winter?"

"There is a bit of winter-shooting, I believe," he answered her, "but I was thinking mostly of my father.

The Traive is one of the earliest salmon-rivers in Scotland; clean fish begin to come up from the sea in December, if the weather is at all open; and then at the middle of January my father and old Angus can set to work either on the river or by trolling in the loch—"

"The bleakness!" she exclaimed. "The desolation——"

"That does not matter to a blind man," he replied to her. "Summer and winter are alike to a blind man —if he is protected from the heat and the cold. And trolling for salmon is just what my father can do best; for he does not notice the shaking of the point of the rod, and before he strikes the fish has time to make a good bolt of the minnow."

"Then it may be a long time before you are in Invernish again?" she said, rather nervously.

"I am afraid so," he made answer—and he spoke in quite a matter-of-fact way: "You see, if any of my partners on the other side were so inhuman as to summon me across the water—though I think I have made arrangements to prevent that possibility—and if I were travelling south in a hurry, of course I should go straight through. But that is not likely to happen. I should be vexed to have to leave my father alone at Alt-na-Traive.——"

"Oh, wouldn't you let me——" And then she suddenly stopped, in some little confusion; and indeed she had no opportunity of making clear her request, for at this moment a glance from the Bean-an-Tighearn signalled to her, and presently the two ladies had risen from the table, and arm-in-arm were making their way towards the withdrawing-room.

When cigars, coffee, and liqueurs had been formally brought in, Somerled said in an undertone to Archie Gilchrist—

"Can I have a word or two with you?"

He rose, and Gilchrist followed him. They went into a deep window-recess where there were chairs, but they did not sit down.

"Only a word or two," Somerled said, "and I hope you will meet me in a placable spirit, and show yourself reasonable, even if I should seem to be impertinent. You told me that you and Miss Macdonald were engaged to be married?"

"I told you so as an absolute secret!" interposed Gilchrist, hastily.

"And I promised that I would keep your secret," responded Somerled, quietly. "Well, all I need say is that you are lucky, to be the man of her choice. The one she has chosen—lucky is perhaps not the best word."

"It does not bear to be spoken about as yet," Gilchrist said. "It is all so distant and uncertain; and it must remain distant and uncertain while she wishes it to be so, for what she wishes is law to me—and no wonder. I could not be so ungrateful as to become importunate—especially as I am situated at present."

"That is what I am coming to," Somerled continued, in quite a dispassionate way. "The truth is, I have been forming my own opinion as to the state of affairs, from an outsider's point of view, of course. And I daresay, now, it would be more satisfactory to the mother—and also to the daughter herself, going amongst her friends —if you had a more assured position—will you let

me be quite frank, and say a more distinguished position?"

"Don't I know that?" said Gilchrist; the words were true: why should he take offence?

"Yes, I guessed that you must have been considering this aspect of the future——"

"And not over hopefully," put in the other, in rather a downcast way.

"You see," Somerled Macdonald proceeded—as if he were talking of steel rails—"in that literary world where you and she first made acquaintance—in that imaginary world—all people are equal, I suppose; and 'White Cockade' and 'Fairfax' are of any grade, or no grade at all; but in the actual world, where Miss Macdonald of Kinvaig has her friends and companions to meet—where she has to be introduced to visitors—strangers, perhaps, curious to see her because of her lineage and her historical name—to say nothing of her own brilliant and striking personality—these people might naturally ask, 'And who is this whom she has married?'"

"Don't I know—don't I know?" Gilchrist exclaimed: what was the use of raking up all those troubled forecasts and apprehensions, that he was only too familiar with in the sleepless hours of the night?

"Now we have arrived at the point," the young railway-king resumed, with something of a blither air. "You remember how I bored you the other day with questions about the social estimation enjoyed by the proprietor and editor of the Invernish *Observer;* and you were most explicit: a most distinguished position; a position of influence and power; a position entitling the holder of it

to great consideration, not merely municipal. And of course, if ever I should go back to Ontario again, and if one of the old Glengarva folk should be saying to me: 'Well, and is it true that Miss Eelin has got married, and who is the one she has married?" then I should be proud to answer: 'Oh, a very notable man—one of the most prominent men in the north of Scotland—the proprietor of that very Invernish *Observer* that comes out here sometimes, and is sent round the farms. Miss Eelin has married a man of standing and consideration in the Northern and Western Highlands; what he writes in the *Observer* they have to pay attention to in the House of Commons.' That would be fine news, indeed; and if any of them had happened to hear of the Mountmahon rumour, it would put an end to that for good and all. And so I consider myself justified in what I have done—that is, if you'll be peaceful and reasonable, and show no false pride—"

"But I don't understand," said Archie Gilchrist, with the great grey eyes grown quite mystified. One thing only he knew: this was no sorry jest, or the name of Eelin Macdonald would not have been introduced into it —by Somerled Macdonald.

"Why, man, it's simple enough!" his companion said, regarding him. "The paper's yours. The Invernish *Observer* is yours—lock, stock and barrel—freehold building, plant, machinery,—everything—with the proviso that some Mr.—Grieve, is it?—should retain his present post, and perhaps with some little increase of salary, to reconcile him to your stepping over his head. Now, do you understand? No? Well, I have bought this property—that is to say, Dr. Gillespie and I are

practically agreed to accept the rough valuation that has been made—only, the lawyers must have their turn at it, and that may be a tedious business. However, at this present moment you are virtually and literally the owner of the Invernish *Observer,* and editor as well—"

"But it is impossible!" said Gilchrist. "I have no capital—I could never repay. It is a large property; I have no one at my back; how could I ever pay the interest on so great a sum?"

"Gilchrist, man, why will you fly off at a tangent?" Macdonald said—and yet he was amused. "I wish to make Miss Eelin a little wedding-present; and you talk of your being unable to pay me interest on the purchase-money! Go away! Why not be reasonable, and placable, and step into Dr. Gillespie's shoes—and let the poor man off to his golf? Must I explain any further? Must I try to show you that my scheme is not so preposterous as it may look at first sight? Well, then, it comes to this. I have got a good bit of money—with a machine constructed for making more; and I am a lonely man; my father is almost my sole companion, and he cannot last for ever; then I am inveigled into this country of wonder and poetry, and wild romance—at least, so I have been taught to consider it ever since my childhood; and then the two ladies of Kinvaig—but I cannot tell you how out there we regard them—they are just about worshipped, if only for the name they bear—then they honour us by their kindness and their condescension far beyond what any human creature could imagine; and then comes a chance of my executing a small piece of bravado in a quiet way—and how can I resist? I suppose the witchery in the atmosphere has got hold of

me. Moreover, I have never had much fancy for self-advertising; I should not care to go about the country receiving votes of thanks from town councils, and that kind of thing; but here is a little proposition that need never be whispered to anyone except those immediately concerned—that is, if you have a grain of common-sense. And by-and-by, no doubt when you have occupied the editorial chair for a time, and kept up the literary reputation of the paper, then one of the Universities will be conferring a degree upon you—"

"But this is too astounding!" Gilchrist protested. "Why, you don't know me! I am almost a stranger to you. Why should you interest yourself in me?"

"Why should I interest myself in you?" his companion repeated, slowly. "Why?" And then, after a moment's hesitation, he seemed to laugh the question aside. "Come, come," he said, more briskly, "let's have no further talking. The thing is settled."

For by this time the elder Macdonald—out there in the brilliantly-lit room—had twice called to his son, urging him to make haste: it was time they went to join their other guests. And now, as Somerled and Gilchrist passed along by the side of the table, the latter said in a low voice—

"Is what you have just told me to remain a secret?"

"Not from anyone who is here with us this night," was the answer.

"Not from anyone?"

"No—unless you please."

Then, when they went into the drawing-room, Archie Gilchrist managed to secure a seat next Eelin Macdonald, and he said that he had a communication to make to

her that would surprise her a little. Old Allan Macdonald, guided by the Doctor, had gone on to talk to the Bean-an-Tighearn; and so Somerled, for the moment finding himself superfluous, turned idly to the window, to look down into the street. And then it was that Archie Gilchrist told his tale of this munificent thing that had befallen him—and her, too, in a way; and all the time that he was telling her, Wild Eelin never once let her earnest gaze wander from the face of the man who was standing at the window. It was only his profile that she could see; but it seemed to occupy her engrossingly.

CHAPTER XIII.

A LETTER.

"HERE—Haggart!—David Haggart!" called Morag, as she scurried up the drive and round by the holly hedge, so as to overtake Maxwell the gardener. "You that's the fine one to murder people—you that's the fine one to break open chiles—here's something for you."

"Oh, what are ye clamrin' aboot noo, ye Mull idjit!" said old Maxwell, angrily.

"Do you think I am to do all the fighting for this house?" Morag demanded. "Come aweh, now! For I can see the yellow cab; and his lordship will be here in a meenute; and he will be for killing me bekass I put him in the hole by the window. Come aweh, now, and show what a great hero you are, and a murderer, and a fighter. The cab will be at the door directly——"

"Ay, and wha tell't ye it was my business to answer

the door-bell?" said Maxwell, with irascible brows as he moved on to his work.

Then Morag jeered after him.

"Aw, indeed, it is no matter, and we can protect ourselves ferry well; only I wass wishing to see how such a desperate brave man would battle for us. But mebbe David Haggart's soul is aweh buzzin' about the skies just now; and instead of murdering chilers, and brekkin' open chiles, and being hanged in Edinburgh, you are only old Maxwell, that wass not tekkin so many prizes at the Fruit and Flower Show!"

"Ye limmer!" he said—and he glanced about for a stone; but Morag was quicker than he was; for she whipped a green apple off a branch and sent it spinning so near to his head that he had quickly to shield himself with his basket. And then, with a horse-laugh of triumph, she made off—for she wanted to see what was going on in front, while Maxwell, returning to his work, could only comfort himself with malevolent animadversions on Morag's personal appearance—"Ye red-heeded, freckled, thrawn-gabbed jaud," he muttered to himself, "if ye want to frichten his lordship or anybody else, frichten them wi' a look o' your misbegotten, ill-faured face!"

Meanwhile Morag had hidden herself behind some laurel-bushes, through which she could command a view of the situation; but if she were eagerly expectant of some deadly fray—and perhaps not disinclined to take a part in the same—her warlike hopes were wholly disappointed. For Lord Mountmahon, having descended from the canary-coloured barouche, and gone up the steps to the front door, found himself confronted by the

placid-eyed and smooth-spoken Jane who (unmindful of the fact that her father was an elder, and that she herself had been brought up as a decent, honest, truth-telling lass) calmly informed the visitor that the ladies of the house were not at home.

"Oh, it's too bad," he said to her, in petulant mortification. "I've come out three times—so as to deliver this letter in person. It's too bad. I'm not used to being treated in this way. Do you know who I am? I'm not used to it. Perhaps you never gave my messages?——"

"Oh, yes, my lord!" Jane protested.

"Well, I call it a measly shame," he went on, in the same hurt manner. "I don't want to bother their heads off; all I want is to give this letter into Mrs. Macdonald's hands, and to sit in the hall waiting for her answer. Gosh, to think of it!" he continued—but addressing himself rather than Jane. "Sitting on a chair in the hall, like an auctioneer's clerk! Well, I'll do it. My dignity is my own to put in my pocket if I please; and when I've made up my mind to see a thing through, by George, I stick to it——"

"If your lordship would leave the letter," Jane ventured to suggest. "I will take care my mistress has it the moment she comes in."

"Well, I suppose that must be the way of it, after all," his lordship said, sullenly. "I'm sick of this tomfoolery; I'm tired of being turned away from anybody's door. Now mind you give it to her at once; and say I'm expecting an answer as soon as ever it is convenient. Mind you make no mistake about it—and wait a minute —here is something for yourself—"

He fumbled about, and got a half-crown, which he would have presented to her, but Jane drew back.

"My mistress does not wish me to take presents—"

"Oh, d——n your mistress!" he said in a temper; and he dashed the half-crown on to the steps; and then he got into his barouche again—"chist sweerin and sweerin," as Morag subsequently informed her fellow-servants.

Now this letter that Jane carried to her mistress, who was peacefully knitting in the drawing-room, was of a cunning kind, but it was so transparently cunning as to be almost pathetic. Of course he expressed the profoundest penitence for his unforgivable conduct on that previous visit; but all through these self-abasements there ran the piteous key-note of the loss of his mother. It was the lack of her influence that had been the ruin of his life. Ah, but if he were to find a second mother —as good, and kind, and gentle, and ready to take his part: what might not the result be then?

"I don't seek to excuse myself at all," he wrote, "for what happened the last time I saw you. I must have been off my head: I believe that's what it really was, for all the doctors tell me that medsin goes to my brane. I can take as good a lashing of wine as most folks, but medsin plays the very mischief with me and I was a fool to go and call upon anyone after I had been taking quinine and cloriform and muck of that sort. My dear mother, if she had been alive, she would have kept them out of my reach, she used to, when I was a kid, but when you are grown-up, and left to yourself, and surrounded by a lot of selfish beasts that care only for

what they can get out of you, then they'd let you shove your head into a bucket of cloriform if they'd a chance of picking your pockets. And to think that this devilish thing should have occurred just at the end of the season, when I had got everybody cleared away so as you and Miss Eelin could pay a visit to Kinvaig, and not only that, but I had arranged with Lady Dundas to let me have six stags out of Balcruitten—£300—from the 1st to the 15th; and any noble sportsman you might bring along with you as your escort would have been welcome to the stalking. The fact is I'm not quite fit and up to hill-work at present, what with trouble, and all this medsin, and *perhaps anxious hopes.* And now it's all spoilt by that accursed cloriform. It's too bad. I can't offer any excuse, but still I feel that it's uncommon hard luck. That's just where it is, that all my life I've been left to my own devices, without guidance, trying to do my best, and always managing to bash my head against a stone wall, when other Johnnies got clear over. And now, as this affair stands, I know I'm in pretty bad case. If the poor dear Mater were alive, I could send her to you to meditate for me, and besides wouldn't she be immensely curious to catch a glimpse of SOMEBODY, and as I trust that SOMEBODY has been left ignorant of these regretable circumstances, then it only remains for you, dear Mrs. Macdonald, to be a little merciful, and let a poor devil have another chance, and perhaps your friend who comes with you to Kinvaig may get the six stage after all, and all be well. While there's life, there's hope —that's my motto; and though things are looking rather beastly at present, I admit, still there may be merry days ahead, and one must never throw up the sponge.

If they jam you into a pocket—star one!—and come up smiling—that's what I say.

"Of course I know there are things rumoured about me, and that some of them have appeared in those low, mongrel, miserable papers that exist by their malignant and envious abuse of the upper classes. Censers of morals these gentlemen profess to be, but if the rats were dragged out of their drains into the daylight you'd see the kind of censers they really are! Naturally a peer is a conspicuous mark for them; and you can't be hauling them into the law-courts every other day, and paying the costs, for the scoundrels haven't the rag of a paper penny amongst them; and so the libels spread and flourish, and one goes on defenceless—until perhaps you chance upon one or two honourable and kindly women who have a little charity and forgiveness, and who will make excuses, and receive you, and treat you *as one of their own family.* That would be redemtion and no mistake, and just to think it was near coming off when this infernal business of the medsin interferes, and I'm stumped up in a jiffy! *Unless you hold out the olive branch.* That is what my mother would have done in your place, I am certain sure.

"There now, my dear lady, if you don't consider this apology abject enough, I'll make it abjecter—as much as you like; for when I see a great prize just right ahead of me I'm not going to stick at trifles by the way. Keep your eye on the goal—that's my motto; and it's wonderful what persistence can do for you. It's better even than good luck; and that's my experience of life, short and merry as my whirligig of an existence has been.

Well, there's a screed, now. Didn't know I could have managed it; but I hope you'll believe every word of it, and keep all that incident from the knowledge of the beautiful Eelin, for I know that the mother of such an angel must be *an angel herself,* and generous, and not too down on an unfortunate chap who has chanced to make an overwhelming jackass of himself, just once in a blue moon. And perhaps I'll wait in the hall for an answer, or perhaps I'll leave the letter, anyway you'll tell me as soon as you can make up your mind when I may call on you and square up matters and cry quits, and perhaps I may have a few minutes' chat with the *Bell of the North* if you don't mind giving us the opportunity.

"Yours faithfully,

"(A most humble and repentant sinner.)

"MOUNTMAHON."

When she had definitely ascertained that Lord Mountmahon had driven away, and that there was no chance of encountering him anywhere outside, the Bean-an-Tighearn took this letter with her, passed through the French windows of the drawing-room, and went round towards the shrubbery. She knew that Wild Eelin would be somewhere about; for that young lady had just received, for review in the Invernish *Observer,* a book entitled "Life in Graubünden"; and she had pounced upon it with conscientious avidity, determined to read every line of it from end to end—yes, and to give it such favourable notice as might accord with her own superior knowledge, for few were better acquainted with the Grisons than she herself. And her mother guessed that most likely she had hidden herself away in one of these

bosky nooks; and "Eelin," she called—"Eelin, Eelin, where are you?"

The answer seemed to drop from the skies.

"What is it, Mummie?"

The startled mother glanced upward and found that the wretch of a girl had discovered a comfortable seat for herself on a branch half-way up a maple tree, and there she was engaged with her book, though one hand had hold of a bundle of twigs, for safety's sake.

"Come down—come down at once!" the irate mother exclaimed. "They'll see you from the other side of the river!"

"And won't they think it a wonderful sight?" she answered coolly. "A black-haired goddess enthroned among bronze leaves, and half-way up to the clouds!"

"Come down!"

"Oh, very well," she answered again, as she made preparations for her descent. "But," she added, innocently, "it isn't nearly so easy as it looks, when you've a volume in your hand that mustn't be scratched." And yet she managed to swing herself down from branch to branch with a remarkable agility; and then a clear drop of six or seven feet landed her by her mother's side.

"I wish you'd give over these boyish tricks, Eelin," the mother said, with unusual resentment. "Life is too serious for such things. And I don't want all the responsibility. Look at this letter. It concerns you—more than you anticipate. And you'd better sit down and read it, for it is long, and it wants consideration."

"Very sorry to have vexed you, Mummie," the girl said, as she carried the letter to a garden-seat. "And

I seem always to be doing it. But then, I am sincerely penitent, you know."

"Well, you'll find plenty of penitence in these pages," the mother rejoined. "And perhaps you will be moved to a little commiseration and a little sympathy. But I don't know: I don't advise: it's for you to say: there may be something in his representations or there may not. At anyrate he appears to have been a very unfortunate and ill-guided young man—" And with that she moved away to the terrace under the trees overlooking the river: she would give Eelin plenty of time for pondering over this specious, half-piteous schoolboy appeal; and indeed it had furnished herself with some subject for thought and hesitation, though she would hardly have admitted as much.

When Eelin had finished the letter, she crossed the tennis lawn, and joined her mother on the terrace.

"At least there is one who thinks well of me!" said she, proudly.

"And who thinks ill of you, Eelin?"

"They don't take the trouble to think well or ill. And maybe I'm no minding. But this one tells me what I am; listen: I am the beautiful Eelin; I am a prize; I am a goal; I am the *Bell of the North*—without an e:" She had been mocking; but now came an uncontrollable gesture of disgust: "Here, mother, take it away: I can smell the stale cigarette-smoke and the whiskey."

The mother received back the offending pages, and still doubtfully regarded them.

"But what am I to say, Eelin!"

"My compliments to Lord Mountmahon," the girl

replied, scornfully, "And tell him I am not of the marrying kind."

"Now what can you mean!" the Bean-an-Tighearn exclaimed. "When at this very moment you are engaged to be married!"

"Oh, but that's a different thing," Wild Eelin answered, with some conscious colour on her forehead. "That's very different, you know. That's a long way off. There is to be no pressure; one is to be allowed one's freedom—naturally. And besides, just at present Archie Gilchrist is a good deal too busily occupied to have a thought for me. And there are times when you must cut sentimentalities adrift. Taking over the charge of that paper must be rather a big enterprise, I should imagine; only he has broad shoulders; and plenty of courage. Oh, yes, Mummie, you may depend on it he has his hands full—without any intrusion from me. The best I can do is to wish him good luck."

"I don't understand you at all, Eelin, or what is to become of you," the anxious mother said. "Do you really mean to marry Mr. Gilchrist?"

"Mummie, I've 'made up the promise true'!" she cried. "And would you have me break it?" But she altered her tone when she glanced again at the letter her mother held in her hand. "As for *that*—don't you give yourself any more trouble, Mummie, darling, and pretend to have lingering hesitations. Do you think I cannot guess what you are willing to sacrifice—all your best and tenderest feelings, your pride, and in a way your sense of honour—to give me one more chance of attaining a lofty position, as many would consider it?

Yes, and you know it's yourself who would perish from shame if I accepted! Well, put it away from you—"

"Eelin," the mother pleaded, but rather faint-heartedly, "he asks for forgiveness. And it is I who was insulted, not you; and it is I who have the right to forgive——"

"And I tell you whoever insults you insults me twenty times over!" said the girl, vehemently. "Oh, mother, dearest, don't pretend any more! Be true to yourself! You know you would die of shame if I married him. For I can see through you now: though at first I was mean enough to think that you might wish—that you might expect—well, what is never going to happen. And now you'll come away into the drawing-room at once, and get the answer written and sent off, in case he should make it the excuse for paying us another visit." And so she put her hand within her mother's arm; and together they crossed the lawn to the house; and on their way she said lightly: "Oh, but I am a proud girl this day, Mummie! I have been called a prize, and a goal, and I don't know what besides—and all by a half-drunken pot-boy who can't spell!"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE FRIAR'S WALK.

About this time Miss Macdonald of Kinvaig was causing a good deal of trouble to the tradesmen with whom she dealt. Formerly, when purchasing things for her various pensioners, she had simply paid for them in happy-go-lucky fashion until the last of her money was gone; and then she would don the penitential badge

of the Parish of Huntly, and wear it at dinner, to see if her mother's heart would relent. But now she was running two sets of accounts; and one of these, as the drapers, and grocers, and upholsterers discovered, had to be kept with a scrupulous accuracy—a kind of vindictive accuracy, one might almost say—with vouchers for every sixpence expended. And why? Well, it was to send a report of her stewardship to Somerled Macdonald, and to show him that, in dealing with the money he had handed her in trust, she did not expect him to rest content with her own discretion, she preferred he should learn for himself how every penny had been laid out. And so here she was (having just left the town) seated on a bench in the Castle hill enclosure, going over a handful of these crumpled documents. And very well aware was she that this formal forwarding of details—to acquit herself, as it were—would deeply offend and wound the young railway king; and she wickedly hoped it would; though she did not ask herself why. A sort of rebellious pride had got hold of her. She did not wish to be anybody's almoner, to have irresponsible control of money, and reap gratitude which was not her due. Let him come and discover for himself what poor clansfolk were in need of help. But at all events, while she retained the position, these checked and receipted bills of disbursements—no matter how minute—would be periodically dispatched to him. They would form the last link of communication between him and her; for a great space of silence, with dim hills and voiceless skies, now lay between Glengarva House and the distant Alt-na-Traive.

By some accident or other her attention was diverted

from these papers, and happening to glance downwards to the banks of the wide and clear-shining river, she saw that Archie Gilchrist was coming in to the town—his tall figure and swinging gait she easily recognised. And there was no reason in the world why she should not continue on her way home and meet him, and say a civil word to him in passing; for he had proved himself to be the most obedient of lovers; and not only that, but he had shown himself possessed of a most extraordinary sensitiveness in detecting and responding to her varying moods. She had nothing to fear from him. He was to her just whatever she wished him to be; and he had a marvellous gift of divining what she meant, without many words spoken. He held himself as far aloof as even she could desire, and surely an incidental "How do you do?" was but a small and simple acknowledgement of so much consideration. But something of *"la belle dame sans merci"* was in her blood this morning. The moment she caught sight of him she thrust those documents into the small bag she usually carried; she rose from the seat; and instead of going down to the river bank, which was her ordinary route homeward, she left the Castle hill grounds, and went quickly along the highroad leading out into the country. But this she did not follow for any great distance. She came to a turnstile, and passed through it; and now she was in the lonely and unfrequented Friars' Walk; and she concluded that she had come thither unobserved.

The Friars' Walk is a long and winding pathway, cut and built up on the face of the steep and thickly-wooded hill that here overlooks the Nish; and as it is a

cul-de-sac, it is rarely visited in the daytime, though occasionally towards the gloaming fond lovers may linger under its canopy of leaves and listen to the Cathedral bells far below on the other side of the stream. Wild Eelin found herself in sole possession of this secret highway. And now and again she would stop to contemplate one or other of the detached and ever-varying pictures framed by the extending branches of beech and birch and rowan out of the spacious landscape—a far-stretching and dappled landscape that darkened into gloom, or leapt up again in sunshine, as the cumulus masses of cloud came swinging over from the sea. From this lofty terrace a great range of country was visible; but she paid less heed to the dusky hills in the south —by Dochfour, and Castle Urquhart, and Balmacaan; and she paid no heed at all to the swelling uplands opposite her, where the scattered farm-cottages, on the undulations of green and yellow, shone like little white dots in the chasing sunlight; rather her vision was turned towards the north, where, away beyond the slopes and plantations of the Black Isle, and away beyond the Cromarty Firth, the mountains of Ross-shire rose wild and blue into the changing heavens. And there were other regions, still further off, behind that giant rampart, that her imagination could summon up for her. She knew of the silent Strath-Oykel and the widening Kyle of Sutherland, dulled with hurrying showers and glittering out again to the sun; she knew of the desert moorland wastes, the featureless miles and miles, that lay between Lairg and Ben Armin Forest; she, too, a wandering maiden, had been "on Loch Loyal's side, and up by Mudal Water." And also she had been to Alt-

na-Traive, where the deep cobalt of the loch grows deeper and stronger under the impending gloom of Ben Clebrig; and in the white snow-time she had watched the hinds and their calves come down to the edge of the bays, careless of mankind; if any trace of mankind there were in those remote solitudes. It was not at Invernish, and its precipitous and wooded banks, and its broad river, and the Cathedral just below her, that she was now looking; there were wider, and larger, and more lonely scenes spread out before her rapt gaze.

And perhaps there may be something pathetic even in mere distance—some recalling of other hours, with all their abandoned and wistful hopes; or perhaps she had overstrained her sight, in trying to pierce the dim masses of Ben Wyvis and reach the more solitary regions of the north; but at all events her eyes—the eyes like the blue of the sea-wave—had filled with tears; and very impatient and angry with herself was she that such should be the case; and when she heard the footsteps of someone approaching, she would not admit by any furtive touch of a pocket-handkerchief, that she had been near to crying; no, she would brave it out, whoever the stranger might be; and doubtless he would go by without impertinent observation. Well, when she turned to continue on her way, she found the newcomer to be none other than Archie Gilchrist; and instantly she advanced to meet him with great sprightliness and cheerfulness; and her eyes, wide open, were fixed upon him as if she dared him to say there was anything unusual about the brimming lashes.

"I saw you on the Castle hill, Eelin," he said, "and I guessed you might have come in here." Then a quick

look of alarm sprang into his face, and he seemed to draw back. "Oh, but I am intruding," he said, anxiously. "Perhaps you would rather be alone—"

"Oh, no, indeed," said she, with a wonderful blitheness. "I would rather walk with you, as far as the Castle hill at least; then I must get home. My eyes," she continued, smiling, "can't stand the glare from those white clouds; isn't it fearful this morning?" And now the handkerchief was applied to the wet lashes; and presently she had resumed her gay talk.

"I am delighted to see you looking so well," she said to him. "I was afraid the worry and responsibility of becoming editor-in-chief of the *Observer* would be making an old man of you. But it appears to have been as easy as taking command of the Swiss fleet."

And yet he was not wholly deceived.

"Eelin," said he, in a troubled way, "are you sure I haven't forced myself upon you? Don't you want to go home by yourself? I am very sorry—if I overtook you when you were not expecting anyone——"

"Oh, nonsense, nonsense!" said she, goodhumouredly; and she put her hand within his arm (for the first time) so that they really did look like a couple of engaged lovers, under this archway of trembling and swaying leaves, with all the wide-receding, brilliant landscape stretching away from them to the high horizon. "I am most anxious to hear about what has recently happened, and what your immediate plans are. Was the change of government affected without a revolution of any kind? Have you bestowed away all your patronage, without leaving a single malcontent? Is the Invernish *Observer* going to set the Moray Firth on fire?"

And now he began to think he must have been mistaken. After all, there was a decided glare from the resplendent clouds and from the flying sunshine that burned along the green uplands across the river. And then again, perhaps the beautiful eyes, those deep-radiant eyes, were themselves sensitive to light? Anyhow he began (while the touch of her hand on his arm thrilled him to imaginative forecasts) to tell her all he meant to do in his new sphere and condition. And she was so interested, and sympathetic, and cheerfully or mockingly appreciative (according to her wayward moods and impulses, that nevertheless were of an open friendship) that the Friars' Walk, and the steep banks of foliage beneath it, and the glimpses of mountain and sea through the pendulous branches became all glorified to him, on this strange morning. Friars' Walk? It should have been called Lovers' Lane; for it is lovers who go through leafy and sun-bespreckled pathways, when the sounds of the great world they have left behind them are scarcely to be made out on the listening breeze.

"Of course," said he (and he wished the Friars' Walk were five miles long), "I don't magnify my office. The *Observer* is only a minor provincial paper; I know that well enough. But good writing tells, and carries far, if you can get it; and that is what I must try to do. And I have projects, you know," he continued, with increasing animation (for here he was on safe ground, without dread of wounding susceptibilities; and he would rather have her understand that the linking of hand and arm meant nothing to him at all; that she need not fear any reciprocal advance—no, not until she herself gave him the invitation). "I have projects, you

know; I must try to make the paper as little provincial as possible. I must try to appeal to as wide a circle as possible. I may succeed or I may not. I am very ignorant. But Grieve helps me at every turn; and he has had plenty of experience. One of these projects, for example, is a series of papers on certain persons whom the public for its own protection and peace, must immediately jump upon and exterminate. I have been in communication with a member of the Assassins' Club in Piccadilly——"

"What club?' she asked, in wonder.

"The Assassins' Club, they call it, though it has another name," he went on, eagerly glad to interest her in anything, however trivial. "The Club, so they tell me, consists chiefly of literary bravos, who hire themselves out to slay any man's reputation, and sometimes they will do it at ten-and-six a column and sometimes they want two guineas. Well, it isn't a very honourable calling; but then, when necessary, you employ scavengers and dustmen; and in this case there is some justification, for we ought to have the road swept clear before we enter the coming century. Indeed," he said, laughing, "I have got in my pocket the introductory articles of my series; and I could read you a sentence or two just to show you the kind of thing." He brought a small package of MS. and began: "'Against Mr. —— we have no particular objection to urge, as he stands on the steps of the Athenæum Club, buttoning his frock-coat over his portly form, and revolving in his mind what further he can say to the twenty-seven old idiots to whom he annually lectures on French philosophy; but when he has the arrogance to occupy columns in the public prints

with oracular preachings about the books that Englishmen and Englishwomen ought to read, then we begin to inquire what are the qualifications enjoyed by this pragmatical person that he should presume to dictate in any such matter.' Then there begins," continued Gilchrist, with a demure giggle, "an analysis of the pretentious trash 'this person' has himself written—scornful enough, you may be sure; but I won't bore you with that. I would rather read you the beginning of another one: 'Given a disappointed elderly spinster, living in the outskirts of a foreign town, shunned by men and cut by women: to find the value of her furious denunciations of English fashionable society'——"

Wild Eelin's face had grown grave.

"Archie," said she, interrupting him, "I don't like that kind of thing at all. It isn't dignified. No; nor is it dignified in you to hire a bravo—doubtless an anonymous bravo, skulking in the dark. If you object to the arrogance of those people, or to their ignorance, or to their thrusting themselves into notice, why should you yourself not deal with them?"

"I can't write like the fellows at that Club," he answered her; "they have been trained to it."

"At least you would write with a proper courtesy, and reticence, and self-respect," she contended.

"And never get quoted," said he, ruefully. "I was thinking of the paper. What I have read to you is a specimen of the sort of thing the public likes nowadays."

"Well, I wouldn't pander to any such liking," said she, distinctly. "If I were you, I should think of myself first, and the paper afterwards."

Why, it was an injunction! The hapless series was doomed. And Archie Gilchrist was for a moment considering what compensation he should have to pay to the member of the Assassins' Club when alas! these two arrived at the wooden turnstile, and the lad-and-lass attitude had to be abandoned, for in passing from under the arch of foliage out into the wide open thoroughfare, they seemed to have returned to the world again, with its suspicious scrutiny. And yet the most agitated prude might have been reassured if only she could have heard the conversation that took place between the two lovers as they strolled along the Friars' Walk. It was not such as lovers are wont to use.

Then when they came to the parting of their ways, the tall, flaxen-haired young Editor held on towards the town, while she sped off home. She was in one of her gay moods, it was as if she were rejoicing in some undefined sensation of release. She was chanting to herself—not singing, but rhythmically reciting so that the words should fall in with the swing of her boyish stride —all kinds of snatches of Jacobite minstrelsy—

> "Wha the deil hae we gotten for a King,
> But a wee, wee German lairdie!"

and there was a splendid disdain in her tone now and again—

> "The very dogs o' England's court
> Can bark and howl in German!"

And then when she came to the upper suspension-bridge she descried, in the blinding silver of the stream, a tiny black speck; and she knew that was old Fergus patiently thrashing away at the unresponsive pools; so she walked

quickly along the bank, and before going into the house she called jeeringly to him—

"Why don't you howk him out, Fergus?"

The answer was unexpected.

"I've just lost one, Miss Eelin."

"Oh, well now!" she called again, in accents of deep and sincere disappointment. "That was a shame! And you so persevering. But never mind—there's more where that one came from. And you know I wish you good luck anyway."

"I'm sure you do that, Miss Eelin," was the last reply that came from the baggy man out in the river, as she turned to go in at the gate.

She reported herself to her mother, who was in the drawing-room.

"And I had a bit of a walk with Archie Gilchrist, Mummie," she went on, briskly. "Oh, I can tell you his enthusiasm over the duties of his new post, and his various projects, is quite delightful. It is so full of hope and courage. The responsibilities don't frighten him a bit. And I think he will make himself heard. His eyes have always been fixed on a wide horizon; I could see that even in the 'Fairfax' papers. Then what an enjoyment it must be to a young man to have such opportunities—to know that he can exert influence—it is a wonderful position for a young man——"

"Eelin," said her mother, laying down her work, and regarding the girl steadily, "have you ever considered the how and why of his gaining that position? Have you ever asked yourself how a shrewd business man like Somerled Macdonald came to hand over such a stupendous gift to a young fellow of whom he knew next to nothing?"

"Why, you know as well as I, Mummie!" the girl exclaimed. "Both he and his father would tell you that he had been 'brought up in the faith,' that is their phrase. From his infancy he has been educated into a romantic devotion to the House of Kinvaig; and in his eyes we are its representatives; and then he comes over here, and finds that I am engaged to a young man who is not well off, and what he says to the young man is: 'Here, take this to better your position; and you can't refuse it, because it is Miss Macdonald's dowry.' Archie told me so."

"Eelin," said the mother, "that is all very well and very specious. But what I know is, looking at the extraordinary situation of affairs—what I am sure of is that Somerled Macdonald is either mad or madly in love; and if he is madly in love, it is with you!"

The girl gave a piteous little cry.

"Mother, mother, how can you say such things! Is it fair? Why, he never threw a word or a look in my direction! Of course not! He is too proud—to think of anyone like me. And then—then—he knew I was promised away; and—and—an honourable man would not seek—would not seek to come between engaged people—any more than between married people. He never had a thought or a look for me—of course not—he is far too proud to think of anyone so insignificant—and out of the world—and useless; and besides—besides—he knew that I had promised myself away—he knew that——"

She had gone to the open French window, and was looking out, so that her mother should not see her trembling lips as she uttered the incoherent sentences;

and yet she held her head high, and her hands were clenched at her side, so that there should be no other sign, even to herself. And then she took a turn or two in the garden; and still she held her head high; and now her lips were no longer trembling; there was something of a haughty and independent air about the fine-featured Highland face. Her wayward moods were of short duration—or she could make them appear to be so. When she went back into the drawing-room, she called to her mother—

"Come away, now, Mummie, darling, and let us choose the shade for your bonnet. I'm going to trim it myself, you know; I won't let Mrs. Rogart interfere. And if I make a guy of you, you can tell me where to go—and Beelzebub will conduct me."

But the relations between those two can best be described by the following scrap of conversation. As they were engaged in their millinery studies, the mother said—

"Now look here, Eelin, one thing I must impress on you, and that is, when I am gone, you shall not wear black for me. Will you remember? Any colour you like—but not black. I warn you not to wear black for me; for if you do, I'll come back and thrash you!"

"I'll take that thrashing, Mummie," said Wild Eelin, "—and welcome!"

CHAPTER XV.

PERSISTERE.

THE next morning threatened to be showery: a cab was telephoned for to come out from the town; and Mrs. Macdonald set out on a series of business-calls, which eventually landed her in front of a bookseller's shop in Union-street. Now Union-street is a very short thoroughfare, in which anyone can easily be descried; and Lord Mountmahon, happening to come out from the railway-station at this moment, perceived the Bean-an-Tighearn just as she was crossing the pavement. That was enough. He instantly set off in pursuit. At letter-writing he was not very excellent; but face-to-face with anyone he could give a good account of himself, or he thought he could. And his sense of injury—of manifold injuries—quickened his step.

Meanwhile the Lady of the House of Kinvaig had entered the shop, and nodded to the two young damsels behind the counter, who were particular friends of hers. They, however, chanced to be engaged with several customers; accordingly she took a seat at the central table; and began to look at photographs. So here was Mountmahon's opportunity.

"Oh, I say, Mrs. Macdonald," he began, in a most hurt and reproachful fashion, the moment he drew near, "I do think you have treated me very badly. You now say in your letter that your daughter is engaged to be married. But why wasn't I told before?"

"It is quite a recent engagement," Eelin's mother answered, looking very much distressed—for who could

tell what scraps of this conversation might not reach the people standing at the counter? "And besides no one imagined that it could be of the slightest concern to you."

"And neither it is!" he said, with bluff good nature. "Of course not! An engagement can always be broken where there is sufficient inducement; and I am offering your daughter a very good inducement—oh, yes, pretty tolerable, don't you make any mistake. And I never yet met the man or woman who would stick at trifles where there was sufficient inducement—never once, during my toddle through this old rag-and-bone shop of a world. It's each one for himself or herself, and why not? It's human nature. It's born in your blood and bone. And if it comes to that, I have found that the she's are ever so much more wide awake to their own interests than the he's. A man will do madly generous things where a woman is concerned; and the woman will pick the last farthing out of his pocket. I'm a bit of a philosopher, you must understand: I've seen life, I've kept my eyes open. I'm not such a sop, you know. I've had experience of people. I know their ways. I'm not often sharped—unless it's over gee-gees; and I've told you already I mean to get rid of my blessed assortment of old horse-hair trunks if a certain event is likely to come off. Persistare—that's my motto. There may be obstacles; but obstacles were just stuck up for you to take them clean and clever; and whether it's hurdles or the water-jump, you get there in the end. I'm not a young man from the country. And in the present case, my dear lady, allow me to say that I really think you owe me a little compensation, for the way I've been knocked

about and jockeyed. And what shall it be? Well, tell me the name of the happy man who at present imagines he is going to marry your daughter."

The constraint and embarrassment visible in the face of the gentle-born and gentle-bred lady had not been unnoticed; and the elder of the two sisters behind the counter, having now got rid of her customers, would very much like to have interfered, so obvious was the persecution. But what could she do? If she had asked Mrs. Macdonald to step into their private parlour, Mountmahon would have followed; there was no surplus of shyness about the young man. And indeed the Bean-an-Tighearn considered that the best way of getting rid of him was to answer his questions, however impertinent; and so she said quietly—

"My daughter is engaged to Mr. Gilchrist, the Editor of the Inverish *Observer*."

"Oh," said he, in joyful surprise, "is that all? Only a newspaper fellow? Oh, that's all right! That's all right. Newspaper fellows can always be squared, if you go the right way about it. Her ladyship, poor dear girl, was awfully clever at it; she could twist them round her finger; it was lovely to look on and admire. But even she got tricked once—yes, she did: an American chap—correspondent of a London newspaper—I forget his name, but I remember his ugly mug—well, he was in Scotland, and we asked him to come across for a day or two's stalking—not that he could go stalking any more than a cow—bless you, an hour on the hill would have burst the breath out of his body! But we knew that an invitation to join our house-party would just make him dotty with pride; and the fact is her lady-

ship wanted some information about certain American securities. The man came—hung about the place—but not a word could we get out of him that was of the least use to us; and the next we heard of him was that he had written an article in some New York journal, describing the people in the house, and the ways of the house, and even the furniture in the house, down to the jug that brought him his hot water in the morning, because the jug had a coronet painted on it! Well, never mind, Mrs. Macdonald; once bitten, twice shy; and we've had dealings with other newspaper men, and they're not such bad fellows when you take them the right way. And you'll see that I'll get this chap squared, and hushed up, and sent off. You trust to me. It's for your daughter's advantage, I make bold to think. When I take an idea into my head, I generally hold on to it; and I generally succeed in the end—yes, I do. You trust to me. Gilchrist, did you say? Gilchrist? Why, not the lanky, straw-haired bounder I met one day at your house. Oh, that's all, is it? And the Invernish *Observer* office, did you say? Very well. That's quite right. That's perfectly right. You trust to me. And we'll either get the weather of this newspaper chap, or by the Lord Harry we'll run clean through him!"

At this moment Mrs. Macdonald perceived that the elder of the two young ladies behind the counter was now disengaged, and she rose from her seat and went over to her, hoping to find refuge in inquiries about the new magazines. But the podgy young man in the yellow Newmarket coat and brown billycock hat followed her.

"Don't let me intrude—hanged if I would intrude

on anybody," said he—but he was obviously in great spirits, and inclined to be communicative, and friendly, and garrulous. "Only one word more. I must really tell you what happened to me yesterday. A revelation —by gad! Well, the long and the short of the story is that in the afternoon I went out to see Miss Eelin herself, to ask her about your letter and its flabbergastin announcement. I hadn't got to Glengarva House, I had only got as far as General Mallock's house, when I chanced to look through the railings, and there was lawn-tennis going on in the front garden. And who but Miss Eelin was there!—oh, my heavens, all the goddesses on Mount Olympus—or Mount Marathon—or wherever it was—all of them boiled together couldn't have equalled the grace of her skipping about. Oh, my heavens, I never saw anything like it! Why, she danced!—she literally danced all the time! When she served a ball she went back a bit and then gave a little tripping dance forward; and when she ran to overtake a nasty one, it was a kind of tripping dance; and when she ran back to her station, it was all a dancing movement—I tell you, I never saw anything like it for grace —and—and—laughing enjoyment! Oh, why can't we remain always young like that?" continued the philosopher; and then he said more darkly: "Of course I couldn't go into the garden to speak with her; for General Mallock and I don't quite hit it off; he has said some things about me that were most uncalled for; and I wouldn't enter his door. But that didn't hinder my looking through the fence—and they couldn't see me either—and I give you my word it was a raree-show fit for a Prince of the blood royal! Why, she looked so

tall—was that the plaiting of her skirts?—anyhow, they hung admirably; and when she sprang to catch a ball high in air you could see the perfect outlines of her figure—oh, my heavens, talk of the Empire or the Troc—they're not in it! And I put it to you now—I put it to you straight—can you be surprised at my admiration? Well, admiration isn't the word—call it infatuation, blind infatuation, if you like—for we only live once. And can you be surprised at my persistency? But look at the splendid prize I have in view: you, as her mother, must admit that; don't you think I am justified in persevering—even with deuced little encouragement? Ah, but wait a bit. You'll see whether I can manage affairs or not. I have a way, you know. I'm not a boastful ass; but on the other hand, I'm not a sop. However, I fear I'm interrupting your purchases, Mrs. Macdonald; awfully sorry; rather an enticing subject, you know; gracious heavens, such a picture she was—all in white, except for the blue Tam o' Shanter—like summer come back again, and dancing on the green—and her small brown boots twinkling all over the grass like butterflies. Yes, they did. Oh, you needn't be shamefaced about it. You are her mother; you ought to be proud of such a splendid and bewitching creature—so lithe, and lissom, and—and—laughing all over the place. No hang-dog mouths for her, I warrant! Why, she is too well made to be sulky! It's only ill-made women who are sulky—women who are broken about the waist and in-kneed. Well, good-bye, Mrs. Macdonald. You shall hear from me—and soon, I reckon. Keep up your heart: the world's young yet!" And therewith he took his leave.

But he had not far to go in order to pay his next

call. He went straight to the office of the Invernish *Observer*. He sent in his name; and was asked to walk upstairs; the Editor would see him. And he advanced into the room with a propitiatory grin on his rotund features: he did not anticipate much trouble.

"Greatly obliged to you, Mr. Gilchrist," said he, as he seated himself close to the editorial desk, "for you must be a very busy man; and what I have come about may occupy a little of your time. And yet why should it? Life is life; and we are no longer children. No; let us look at this affair like two men of the world. You know who I am; I can pay my way; and I generally get what I want. You, on the other hand, have a very honourable position—oh, distinctly so—it's not for me to question the power of the press—especially when they describe my hot-water jugs—but you know, between ourselves, you can't be making a very good thing out of this miserable local newspaper. It's not to be expected, now is it?"

Archie Gilchrist regarded the young man calmly and curiously, not quite sure what to do with him. He had only consented to admit him because of the chance meeting in Glengarva House; otherwise, the general reputation which his lordship bore might have proved a bar; to say nothing of a far more subtle antagonism that had been aroused on the occasion of the Highland gathering. And yet there was something about the pot-boy's friendly and confidential manner that rather disarmed resentment.

"Now let's play frank and fair, Mr. Gilchrist," he continued, in the most good-humoured fashion. "There are no witnesses. If I have a proposal to make, and

you don't like it, you can chuck it, and no harm done —quite simple."

"But what is this proposal?" said Gilchrist, with some impatience.

"Well, as I understand, you are engaged to be married to Miss Eelin Macdonald," his lordship said, bluntly enough; but when he saw that Gilchrist's brows had instantly contracted, he was quick to guard himself against the coming charge of impertinence. "Oh, but listen. I have her mother's word for it. I was talking to her mother only a few minutes ago, and it's in consequence of that conversation that I'm here. And what I want to point out to you—oh, hang it, I wish I had the gift of the gab—I hope I'm not going to blunder this transaction—after all it's rather delicate—yes, it is, devilish delicate. I say, couldn't you give me a glass of some fizzing stuff—champagne, or soda-water, or anything—to clear my brain for a moment?"

"I'm afraid there's nothing of the kind in the office," Gilchrist answered. "But why can't you say at once what it is you want? What is this proposal? And you'll succeed better if you leave Miss Macdonald's name out of the question altogether."

"I can't very well do that," said the podgy young man, with a sort of imbecile laugh. "For it's about Miss Macdonald that the whole question turns. Hang it, where's my brain going? When her ladyship was alive, she used to say, 'Now, Mounty, brace up!' and that put me on my mettle, don't you know, and I had another try at getting this old coal-scuttle of a head of mine to work. Very well; here goes. The fact is, Mr. Gilchrist, you are a very lucky fellow; you are engaged

to an uncommonly fetching girl; my goodness, I needn't tell you, you know! And to think of waltzing with such a glorious creature—'The Blue Danube,' the 'Toreador,' any of them makes one's head reel; but you must recognise after all, my good friend, that a lucky engagement isn't everything in life. You are a young man, and you have your way to make before you; I am a young man, but I've had my way made for me—and if it has been a devil of a mess hitherto, well, I am responsible: I own to that. But still, here I am. And the question is, are you prepared to be a reasonable person? Plump and plain, will you accept some consideration—some handsome consideration—and yet reasonable, you know—reasonable—I say, will you accept some handsome compensation to back out of this engagement, so as to leave me installed in your place? That's the idea. That's the project. And you needn't get waxy about it, for you can chuck it if you like. But as two men of the world, I think we should be acting in a sensible way if we came to terms. We're not children, sentimental jackasses of schoolgirls. I can make it worth your while. Oh, you needn't look so waxy—why, man, it's a matter of business—if you don't like it you can lump it, only I hope you won't be such a horrible fool——"

All of a sudden the expression of Archie Gilchrist's face changed: the amazement, and, indignation, and wrath went clean out of it.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, Lord Mountmahon," said he, quite simply and humbly; "I was forgetting. You said you had just been speaking to Mrs. Macdonald. And perhaps it is with her authority—or perhaps it is

even with her daughter's sanction—that you put this suggestion before me?"

"No, I can't say that, I can't say that," Mountmahon honestly confessed. "But I thought it was a reasonable thing, for everyone concerned."

At this the big grey eyes began to burn.

"Then am I to understand that this insolent proposal has entirely arisen out of your own ignorant presumption?"

"I tell you I thought it was a reasonable thing!" his lordship pleaded—but he did not like the look of the young man in the editorial chair.

Archie Gilchrist rose and strode to the door, and when he had opened it wide, he said:

"Out!"

His lordship also rose; but there was still some protest left in him.

"Oh, don't be a horrible fool!" he said.

"Out!" came the menacing monosyllable again.

"You are making a horrible mistake, you know—you'll think better of it afterwards——"

"Out!"

Then as there was clearly and obviously and ominously the danger of a parting kick, the crapulous idiot did leave the room—his pasty face white with passion; and how he made his way along the rather dusky corridor and down the corkscrew stair did not in the least matter to Archie Gilchrist—who had returned to his desk, with his hands all trembling; he had exercised an admirable self-control.

And all ablaze with execration and anathema was

the soul of Lord Mountmahon as he walked back into Union-street and along to the railway station. He was not used to be treated in this manner. Moreover he rather prided himself on his diplomatic gifts; the truth being that any luck he ever had experienced in escaping from trouble had been due to the nimble wit of his wife, the poor lass from the music-halls who had come to an untimely end in the river Garva. He was furious over his failure. He cursed a mongrel cur that ran between his legs. "No, no!" he said, angrily, to a cabman who offered his services. And at last he reached the refreshment room of the station, where, as he had anticipated, he found his bullet-headed and broken-nosed fraternity carousing.

Yes, here they were, the whole half-dozen of them, at a table occupied by themselves; and "More ham-sandwiches—more champagne!" was their cry, while the heavy jowls worked assiduously. Mountmahon regarded the crew of them with open contempt.

"It's all you're fit for, you guzzling gang! Why on earth I should ever have thought of bringing you to the Highlands I can't think! What do you do for me?"

"Look here, guvnor," said one of them, sulkily, "can't we 'ave a 'oliday, once in a while? What's the good o' kicking our 'eels at Bridge of Kinvaig, when you've sent heverybody away, and there's no tips and no nothing?"

"And not a bloomin' quid for the last three weeks!" said another—for the Pretorian guard was obviously in revolt.

"And we've kep quiet about all them turf things a mighty long time: we've got to be paid, or the bloomin

fat'll be in the bloomin fire," said another of the bullet-heads, whose appearance might have been a little more prepossessing if his white paper collar had not got burst, with one end up at his left ear.

Mountmahon drew in a chair, and sate down.

"A pretty lot you are!" he said, bitterly. "I've fed you and pampered you until you've gone clean out of your wits. And if there should be a few sovereigns overdue, have you ever found me fail in the end? And here you are gormandising fit to bring on sunstroke; and here am I, just been insulted to my face, and ordered out of an office by a miserable newspaper fellow—"

"Oh, I say, guvnor, we're not going to stand that!" exclaimed another of the bullet-heads, whose tightly-tied blue neckerchief seemed suggestive of apoplexy. "No, we won't. You've done us bloomin well since we came to this country—and I'll hammer the inside out of any man as says you aint. Well, give us the name o' this feller. Just let's hear about him. Do you want us to leave a card on him and ask about his 'ealth?"

"I want you to gouge his eyes out!" said Mountmahon, gloomily. "But of course you won't. You'd rather lob-lolly about these refreshment-rooms, and stuff yourselves until you can't stir. Why did I bring you to the Highlands?"

"Because ye couldn't 'elp it," said one of them, grinning over a glass of champagne.

"Shut up, Conky—you're a hideous cad and that's what you are," said the one who had spoken before. "And what I will maintain is that his lordship has done us bloomin' well; and that we're bound to play this little game for him, especially as we're sniggling off to the

South. His name, guv'nor! That's all we want. We'll find out the rest—and how we can set about to nick him. Bless you, we'll paint his figger-head for him that his own mother wouldn't recognise him. Cheer up, guvnor!—ain't like you to be down in the mouth. 'Ave some fizz—'ave a sangwich—that's right!—and you see if we don't give him a drilling—the bloomin' cheek of the pig!"

CHAPTER XVI.

AN EXPEDITION.

THERE came alarming news from the north—though there was no intention to alarm. It was Somerled Macdonald who wrote; and the occasion was his acknowledgment of the receipt of the tradesmen's bills that Eelin had sent him. A formal acknowledgment it was too; she could detect no resentment in his tone; he merely said he was sorry she had taken the trouble. Then he went on: "I regret to add that my father has been, and is, seriously ill. He appears to have caught an attack of influenza just before leaving Invernish; and the exposure of the long drive from Lairg did him harm. Of course I would not otherwise bother you with our poor affairs; but he has put it on me by way of command; and so I obey. His constant cry is to be permitted, before he dies, once more to hear the voice of her ladyship, and your own voice, Miss Macdonald; and as he cannot be moved at present, he keeps asking whether there is no chance of your coming round here within the next week or two; he says you spoke as if you were familiar with the neighbourhood, and sometimes visited it. Please do

not attach too much importance to these half-delirious pinings of an invalid. For myself, I could not dream of begging your mother and you to undertake such a journey. Far from it. We are strangers to you. We have trespassed on your kindness too much already—ever since we came to this country indeed. And I am writing now merely because I promised to write; for it is not easy to gainsay a blind man. And perhaps the best plan would be for you to reply nothing at all; then he would assume you had gone away to the South. In any case I most humbly apologise for having so far taken up your time and attention; and the unanswered letter need not give you another thought."

When Eelin Macdonald read those lines her face was hot, her hands were trembling; and fifteen different resolutions rushed through her brain in as many consecutive seconds. Then quickly she carried the offending missive into the drawing-room; and her last mood was of indignation.

"Look here, mother, did you ever see such insolence!" she exclaimed. "His stand-offishness is nothing less than insolence! It is pride—a low-born pride—the self-conscious pride of the democrat. Of course I'm very sorry for the poor old man; but as for the son—he seems to think we are black-beetles simply because he is a democrat—"

"The poor old man—yes, indeed—in that solitary inn," the Bean-an-Tighearn repeated, as she scanned these pages. "Well, I must go. It may be a mere sentimental attachment he has to the House of Kinvaig; but that is something; in these days loyalty of any kind is rare enough. Then he has been more than generous

towards us—and so has his son, though he does not seem to have found favour in your eyes. Now write out a telegram, Eelin, so that a waggonette may be waiting for me at Lairg to-morrow at one o'clock—"

"You will take Jane with you, mother!" the girl protested—and still her face was flushed and still she held her head high.

"Oh, no, not at all—it is quite unnecessary," was the answer.

Wild Eelin hesitated for a second or so.

"Mummie, you're not going all that way alone!—all the way to Alt-na-Traive!" she pleaded; and therewith, for no apparent reason whatever, she burst out crying.

"Eelin, have you taken leave of your senses!" the mother said, in wonder. "Of course you can come with me if you like. Only you seemed to think—"

"Yes, and I still think it!" she said, in the same indignant tone. "That letter is insolent with pride. We are not black-beetles. And Somerled Macdonald is not the Maker of the Universe. He may be able to construct railways; but he is not the Maker of the Universe. Do you think Archie Gilchrist would have written that letter? Archie Gilchrist is a gentleman by nature and education. But when you come to the self-conscious pride of the democrat——"

"Eelin Macdonald," said her mother, deliberately, "I ask you again, are you out of your senses altogether? This letter is most respectful—respectful to the verge of humility. And it is most kind and considerate, trying to meet your wishes in every possible direction. However, if you think of going with me, you need only see old Mr. Macdonald. Somerled Macdonald, if I know

anything about him, is not likely to thrust himself in your way."

"Of course not!" she said—and still her face was hot—and still she kept her head high—"the self-conscious pride of the democrat will hold him aloof—even although we did try our best to pay his father and him a little attention when they were in Invernish." And straightway she turned her back, and marched to the wall of the room, and stood silently contemplating the great family tree, with its sixpenny dots of names stuck on the branches—Angus Og, Lord of the Isles—Donald, Lord of the Isles, Earl of Ross—Ranald Macdonell, Earl of Antrim—John Macdonell of Glengarry—Alexander Macdonell of Keppoch—Aeneas Gorm Macdonald of Kinvaig—and all the rest of them; and perhaps it was to console her wounded dignity with the thought that she was the Daughter of a thousand Thanes; and perhaps it was merely to hide the fact that she had to dry her eyes. The mortified vanity of the wretch! And next she sate down and wrote a most affectionate letter to Archie Gilchrist, asking him to come to the station next morning, to bid them good-bye.

The following day broke wild and lowering, with dark masses of cloud rolling in from the west, with heavy downpours from time to time, and yet with sudden rifts of a vivid blue and an equally sudden blaze of silver to send dazzling reflections down on the flooded and sweeping river. The hills were perpetually changing; those nearest at hand for the most part sombre and ominous, their serrated outlines black against the windy skies; those in the south of a paler hue amid the shifting greys; but ever and anon one of them would recede

behind a mystic veil of rain that stole across the landscape, obliterating every well-known feature in its gradual and soft approach. The long branches of the elms and limes beyond the tennis-lawn were bending before the blast; now and again a golden leaf whirled away to go floating down on the stream. The sea-gulls were high in air, circling and screaming; the excitement of the storm was upon them. Altogether it was not a propitious morning for setting out for the North; but both the Bean-an-Tighearn and her daughter were pretty well indifferent to the vagaries of the Highland weather; and besides this was no mere holiday jaunt.

And here at the station was Archie Gilchrist, and furiously blushing was he when he presented Mrs. Macdonald with a very pretty bouquet—for the young man was not accustomed to figure in these little politenesses. He was more at home when he handed Miss Eelin an envelope.

"You will find some verses inside," he said to her, laughing. "The last sigh of the swan. You see, it would never do for the Editor of a paper to appear in his own poet's-corner; so when you see Mr. Somerled Macdonald, you may tell him that he has crushed a bard who might one day have had his bust in Westminster Abbey. It is Bimetallism that Mr. Grieve and I have to deal with, and Ensilage, and the Triple Alliance, and a few matters of that kind: we have no time for twittering. Westminster Abbey must wait."

Which was all very proper and modest; but none the less, the moment the train had left the station, Miss Eelin took out the page of note-paper, and this was the scrap of rhyme she found there;

O Mary—Mary Averiel—
Why did you go from me?—
And why did you break the promise
You made beside the sea?

I gave you all I could, dearest—
A song—or two or three;
And sweet were the nights of betrothal
Down by the side of the sea.

And no ill-will I bear you,
Wherever you may be:
But I wonder if sometimes you think of
The dark nights down by the sea.

She handed over the bit of MS.

"Now, mother, has that the true ring—or has it not?"

Her mother glanced at the verses.

"It is merely a reminiscence of Heine," she said, with a certain air of indifference. "And look at the construction: 'think of' at the end of a line is impossible!"

"A reminiscence of Heine? And if that were so, what better could there be?" the daughter warmly contended. "Ah, but you are always unjust to Archie Gilchrist. Always unfair to him. And why—why? You may say that his manners are a little bit unformed; and certainly he has not had the benefit of a college education: it is all the more credit to him that he has won to the front, or will win to the front. And don't you believe what he said in the station about abandoning his ambitions and sinking into the soft easy-chair of a provincial newspaper. Not at all. Not a bit. I know him better than he knows himself. There is a fire within

him that is not quenched yet, even though his lines have fallen in pleasant places. And no thanks to Somerled Macdonald! If Somerled Macdonald had done his best to ruin this young man's future, he could not have made a stronger effort; but he has not succeeded. The fire is there—whether the end is to be Westminster Abbey or not. And I know for one thing that the rhythm of these little verses is true. It matches on. I can hear it all through the movement of this railway carriage.

"O Mary—Mary Averiel"—

It's all right—it's true——"

"Eelin," said her mother, plaintively, "I have no such prejudice against Mr. Gilchrist as you seem to imagine. But I suppose these lines were written about you. And a stranger might ask whether you had been in the habit of wandering along the seashore at night with a young man."

"And if any stranger asked that of me," she said, proudly, "I should tell him that my name was Eelin Macdonald, and that kindly people sometimes added 'of Kinvaig.' That would be the answer—and a sufficient one, I hope."

They were now emerging into a more spacious world, and the skies were clearing. They crossed the Beauly river, its splendid current driving along in hues of deep cobalt. The plantations and clearances of the Black Isle shone in the sun. They came in sight of the wide waters of the Cromarty Firth, with here and there a schooner anchored in the shallows, and here and there a string of wild duck whirring out to the sea. Ben Wyvis was blue and pale and distant; the clouds were lifting all around. Then up by Tain, and Bonar, and Lairg:

was it a fancy that the air was sweeter here—that the mountains and the larch-woods and the long undulations of heather gave one a nobler sense of life? Loch Shin, with its bays and wooded promontories, looked like fairy-land; but they did not linger very long at Lairg; a waggonette was waiting for them, and they were bound for the wildernesses of the North. Mile after mile across the desolate moor they drove; and now in the basking sunlight all signs of life seemed to have disappeared; not even a butterfly fluttered along the endless wastes of peat-hag and ling. And then when they reached the heights they had a range of mountains within view which are worth the naming for old sake's sake—Craig Vôr in Ben Armin Forest, Clebrig above Loch Naver, Ben Hee in the Reay Forest, Ben Hope in the Kinloch Forest, Ben Loyal the Hill of the Calves. Every one of them she knew; she had wandered about these remote solitudes when she was a very small lass, making friends with the keepers; she had even been privileged to peep into the sanctuaries, when no one else was allowed to approach. For although, properly speaking, the Reay country is the land of the Mackays, there was not a man in all the lone territory who would not have been proud to become the slave of the slim, free-stepping, wide-eyed creature who was the representative of the Macdonalds of Kinvaig.

This was all very well; but now as they began to descend from the heights—from the vast cerulean panorama towards the little hamlet of Alt-na-Traive—the young lady in the waggonette appeared to have lost the self-composure of the tiny maid who had wandered along the Mudal banks. She was perturbed, anxious, ap-

prehensive; if one of the horses kicked a stone and made a bit of a stumble, she grasped the wooden rail behind her as if she feared they were all going to be flung into chaos; she had no eyes for the windy stretches of the loch, or the gloom and shine of the hills; and at last she said, in a kind of frantic despair—

"Mummie, would you mind going on alone! It's you that Mr. Macdonald wants to meet. I can walk back to Lairg——"

"Three-and-twenty miles!"

"It's nothing—I can do it easily!" she exclaimed. "I will wait for you at Lairg. You see, we have been living such a quiet life at Glengarva House that I'm not used to going among strangers——"

"Strangers, Eelin!"

"Yes, indeed. He said so in the insulting letter he sent us yesterday. He said that they were strangers to us. Very well. Let them remain so. I don't mind. And—and—I would rather walk back to Lairg. Three-and-twenty miles?—that's nothing! And to-morrow I shall be waiting for you there; and I shall have a nice luncheon ready for you, after your long drive; and—and I shall be waiting for you there——"

"Nonsense, nonsense, child!" the mother said, severely. "Are you afraid there may be some sorrow to be faced? You will have more of that before your term of life is over. And even at the very worst—and we have no right to anticipate the worst—Mr. Macdonald is full of years and honour; and the greatest honour that could befall him now—well I know it—is that you should take him by the hand and call him your friend. Is that so much for him to ask? Is it anything at all for you to

grant? And you are not going to prove coward at the last moment!"

The girl was abashed and humiliated. All that she could say—mostly to herself—was "I could have walked the three-and-twenty miles easily enough."

And then again she became proud and combative.

"There's someone out on the loch," said her mother. "I hope it is Somerled Macdonald; for that would mean that his father is better—"

But Miss Eelin would not look. She pretended to be listening.

"Why, I hear the ring of it in the carriage wheels—in the tramp of the horses: it has the throb and rhythm of existence in it—"

"Now what are you talking about?" asked the bewildered mother.

"Well, about the little piece of verse you seemed to despise," was the rejoinder (and she would not turn her head towards the loch, where a boat, with a fisherman and two gillies in it, was slowly being taken round the bays). "'O Mary—Mary Averiel'—it has the true ring. My dear mother, you should read Herbert Spencer on 'The Rhythm of Motion.' It is a great natural law. And these lines are in accordance—I can hear them in the horses' hoofs——"

"Eelin, Eelin," the meek mother protested, "how can you be so absurd! The verses seemed to me merely a pretty piece of sentiment——"

"They are the cry of a broken life; and what can be more tragic than that?" she retorted (and still she would not look at the small boat crawling along by the shore). "You can't multiply tragedy: it is an individual

thing. People talk of the tragedy of ten thousand men stretched dead on a battle-field: the tragedy lies with each man by himself, and with his family—perhaps his sweetheart. You can't multiply tragedy. I say this piece of verse has the real personal cry in it, and it may be as true of one as of twenty thousand——"

"Eelin, you are talking for the mere sake of talking!" the mother remonstrated. "Cannot you tell me whether that is Somerled Macdonald out in the boat—you have younger eyes than mine."

"Ah, but you have always been unfair to Archie Gilchrist, Mummie—although perhaps unconsciously," the girl went on. "You would never believe in the future that lies before him. But I do. It isn't a town like Invernish nor a provincial editorship that is going to clip his wings. He sees wide. He has the large style—of course I don't mean in a careless trifle of this kind. And oh! I wish he was here!—I wish we had asked him to come along with us!——"

Down in the hollow lay the little hamlet—the inn, with its dependencies, one or two keeper's cottages, further along the miniature Free Kirk and the adjacent manse. As the waggonette slewed round the corner, by the triangular patch of trees enclosed by a stone wall, Wild Eelin had perforce to cease her feverish and inconsequent chatter; for here, in front of the inn, and seated and muffled up in an armchair, was old Mr. Macdonald, looking frightfully ill, and by his side was his son, who, when these ladies drove up, took off his cap, and remained bareheaded until they should alight.

CHAPTER XVII.

"BY MUDAL WATER."

THE elder Macdonald was dreadfully agitated.

"What?" he said in an eager whisper to his son. "Her ladyship? And Miss Eelin too? Somerled, man, Somerled—help me up!—do you think I can receive them in this fashion?"

But a gentle hand was put on his arm, and the sweetest-voiced woman in Scotland said to him—

"Indeed, you shall not stir. We are not going to put you about in any way, or else we should not have come. We only wanted to see how you were; and I am glad to find you can get out into the fresh air——"

"Ah, but, Madam, you do not understand what an honour your visit is," he said to her in a struggling kind of way. "I dared hardly expect it. But I know who will understand—and that is the Ontario Macdonalds when they hear the news. I dared hardly expect it—or I would have made some preparations for your comfort. It is a remote little inn; but Somerled and I will do our best to entertain you; and I hope you will forgive whatever is amiss. It is an out-of-the-way little inn—and we did not expect you—well, perhaps that is wrong to say—for I hoped—yes, I hoped——"

Now Wild Eelin was in some respects a wise kind of young creature; and when she perceived this agitation on the part of the invalid—and that he seemed scarcely to know what he was saying—she made no scruple about breaking in.

"Oh, but, look here, Mr. Macdonald, we are only

two idle women wandering about the country; and we are accustomed to fend for ourselves; and at the present moment we are horribly in want of tea and bread-and-butter; and these we can get in the inn—and then we will come out and talk to you again. Now rest quiet, and in a few minutes we will come out and talk to you again——"

"Yes, but there must be preparations made for your comfort," he said, querulously. "Somerled—where are you—Somerled!" He tried to call, but was unable.

"Now don't make me angry, Mr. Macdonald," said Miss Eelin, with some tone of authority. "If we had thought we were going to be of the slightest trouble we should not have come near the place."

At this moment Somerled Macdonald returned, and informed the two ladies that rooms would be ready for them directly, and that tea was now being placed for them in the parlour. And so they proceeded to go indoors. As Eelin passed Somerled Macdonald, she had no word of thanks for him, not even a look, while his eyes were submissively lowered. It is true that when she stepped down from the waggonette she had directed a swift, scrutinising glance towards him, and he had answered that in a curiously perplexed and bewildered and timid manner, and she thought that he was paler than his wont. But afterwards she took no notice of him. And now she took no notice of him, as her mother and she went into the inn.

And then when they came out again she devoted herself exclusively to the old man, trying to soothe him into quietude with her blithe rambling talk.

"Why, Mr. Macdonald," she said, "this is a quite

heavenly place for a convalescent. From whichever way the wind blows, it must come to you over leagues and leagues of moorland; and yet here in this corner you are snugly sheltered; even Ben Clebrig up there, that is a terrible brewer of storms, couldn't do anything to harm you. This part of the inn used to be a shooting-lodge in former days; I suppose either the Duke of Sutherland or Lord Reay had it. Lord Reay is the chief of the clan Mackay, of course you know. Did you hear of the reception given to Sir Fitzroy Maclean of Duart and to Maclean of Carsaig when they were out in America? —Macleans from all parts of Canada and the United States flocked to the standard of the chief——"

"And why not?—why not?" said old Allan Macdonald, beginning again to breathe a little more excitedly. She noticed that in a moment, and was off on another tack.

"Oh, those shepherd-lads about here play a most iniquitous game," she went on, gaily. "You see, all the country in this neighbourhood isn't forest; parts of it are under sheep; and so those mischievous lads sometimes get pretty close to where the deer are. And can you guess what they do? They get the forked branch of a bush—a withered one for choice—and they whittle it away until it resembles the antlers of a stag; and then they go out into the open, and stick this in the heather just on the other side of the slope. Anyone would swear it was a deer feeding, its head down, and its body invisible by reason of the slope; and suppose in the evening there was some sportsman returning to the inn and passing that way, why it's enough to make the poor man's heart jump out of his body. For here as he

imagines is a stag close by him; and yet he cannot get at it by any possible stalk; and if he whistled it up, it would be off and away on the other side. That's a pretty trick to play on any innocent person, isn't it?—with a bit of dry wood!—"

"And have you handled the rifle yourself, Miss Eelin?" he asked of her.

"Oh, no!" she cried. "No, no, no! The curse that was laid on the serpent doesn't include me. I have seen the stalkers come home: I know what it is."

"But you throw a line?"

"Occasionally," she said, in an offhand way. "Sometimes—when Lily Neile is lazy. What I like better is to sit in the boat, with a book on my knee; and then when anything exciting occurs I am the gallery. Oh, there's plenty of amusement about. Now and again Dr. Gillespie takes me out with him to the Nairn links, and we have a round or two. It's capital fun to smash a club—when the head flies into the air, and the string unrolls itself in curls: it's like trying to harpoon a whale. Then there are other links. There's one that the cows come straying onto; and I've seen a cow swallow a golf-ball. It was my ball, to tell you the truth, and after a long drive, so that I felt deeply injured—"

"And so did the cow, doubtless," observed her mother.

"Oh, dear, no," was the careless reply. "All the thirty-nine, or fifty-nine, stomachs of that cow couldn't retain the golf-ball. But I thought of writing to the Editor of the *Field*, asking him in the case of a cow swallowing a ball, what kind of a bunker it ought to be considered, and what was the proper method of pro-

cedure—" And so she chattered on, not without aim, and not without success.

Then he said to her—

"Miss Eelin, would you be so very kind as to draw your chair a little nearer, and let me touch your hand for a moment?"

Of course she did so, and he held her hand for a second, and patted it.

"Forgive me for asking you," he proceeded, "but is your hand larger or smaller than her ladyship's? You see, I should like to be able to distinguish between the two, just as I can between the two voices. Ay, the two voices—the two voices," he repeated; "and if the gate of death were wide open for me to-morrow, it is those two voices I should be wishing to hear—at the last—at the last—"

"Oh, about my hands?" the younger lady said, interrupting him without hesitation. "My hands are ever so much bigger and coarser than my mother's—"

"Eelin!"

"Ah, but they are," she continued, taking no heed of her mother's remonstrance. "You see, Mr. Macdonald, I have been brought up, or I have brought up myself, as a tomboy, with rowing, and swinging, and Indian clubs, and such things; while my dear mamma has always kept herself quite the lady, and is as particular about the shape of her nails as she is about her Gaelic inflections. I think an inscrutable Providence designed my clumsy hands for dumb-bells and cricket-bats and things of that sort; and they answer pretty well, you know; I'm not such a horrible duffer, you know; not such an awful duffer; and when I've swum from the

Devil's Kirn to the weir at the Islands, then I'll send you a sixpenny telegram to give you the news."

He let her talk on: the sound of her voice was like wine to him. And then he called out,

"Somerled! Are you there, Somerled?"

But Somerled was not there. Somerled was in earnest confabulation with Mrs. Mackay, the landlady (who, on hearing who her visitors were, had immediately run off to change her gown), and he was imploring her to do this, that, and the other, so that there might be special features at dinner. Were not the neighbouring keepers to be bribed, no matter at what cost? Or could she not have the dog-cart out and send a messenger to Mr. Strang, the factor at Balnavrain, begging for his friendly intervention? Or, perhaps, even, Mrs. Strang could be induced to lend a few custards and jellies and sweetmeats, which could afterwards be repaid to her in kind?

"But, Mr. Macdonald," the landlady said, with some spirit, "we can do such things ourselfs. Hef you been finding any fault?"

"Oh, no, no, far from it," he answered, anxiously. "Perhaps I have not been noticing—that is all. And I wanted something special for these ladies; but, you see, it is impossible to telegraph. Only," he added as a desperate afterthought, "you will make sure that Caitriana has a clean apron on when she waits at table."

"Now, Mr. Macdonald," protested the landlady, in the most good-humoured way, "did you ever see Caitriana go into the parlour with anything but a clean apron?"

"Oh, no, no, of course not!" he said. "Caitriana is

an angel of delight, and is always as neat and trim as a fiddle, and looks after us wonderfully. I was only thinking what could be done. For my father and myself it does not matter; but entertaining strangers——"

"And do you have the opinion that the ladies of Kinvaig are strangers to Alt-na-Traive?" Mrs. Mackay again said, with a mild amazement. "When it was I myself that was giving Miss Eelin her first lessons in the Gaelic, the summers she was spending up at the lodge."

"You'll do your best, then, won't you!" he pleaded finally. "And don't spare any expense or trouble; for we must be their hosts here; they were very kind to us when we were in Invernish. And as for flowers, that is not to be thought of, I'm afraid; but have plenty of heather on the table, and the Macdonalds of Kinvaig will not miss the flowers."

It was Angus the water-bailiff who summoned young Macdonald to his father.

"Somerled," the sick man said, in a kind of undertone, "I fear there is no harp, or piano, or any such thing, in this place? For I would have liked to hear Miss Eelin sing—just once more—before I set out on the long journey——"

Miss Eelin had heard every word; and she was not going to allow any talk of this kind.

"Oh, would you like me to sing something to you, Mr. Macdonald?—for I don't need any piano or harp. Out here in the open is the best place for a Highland song, and the sigh of the hills is the proper accompaniment. And what, now, were you thinking of that I should sing to you?"

"What you please, what you please, my dear young

lady, if you will be so kind to an old man, who may never hear you again."

"Well, the wise lass did not choose a pathetic song; she did not choose the "Fhear a Bhata," that simply rends the hearts of these people in the Western Highlands; she chose a cheerful and contented song, the well known Clachan Ghlinn-da-ruail. A quite contented song, for the hero of it says—

> "Although King George would grant to me
> The highest rank and station,
> I would prefer in Coire-Chathaidh
> The shepherd's pay and ration."

And yet, when Eelin Macdonald, turning her face a little away from them, and looking out on the loch, began to sing in the most simple and natural fashion—

> "I met her on a Sabbath day,
> Mild, young, and unassuming;
> Her voice is like the tuneful thrush,
> Her cheeks are roses blooming—"

it was clear to Mrs. Macdonald that the invalid could not bear this ordeal. It was not the song; the song was nothing; it was the clear, vibrating, penetrating tones of the girl's voice that shook him to the soul; and so great was his emotion—for he was all nerveless and undone after the illness he had passed through—that the mother placed a warning finger on her daughter's arm. Eelin turned, and her singing instantly ceased.

"There are a lot of other verses," said she, in the most unconcerned way, "and I need not bother you—"

He had put his handkerchief up to his face, to conceal the violence of his sobbing: her speaking voice

was like wine to him, and soothed him, but her singing voice—the soft, silver singing of this young girl's voice—wrought destruction within him.

"Oh, yes, a lot of verses," she continued, in the most indifferent manner, and she spoke as if she were really talking out to the wide loch and the hills. "They were written by Angus Fletcher, of Dunoon. Dunoon—that is on the Clyde, you know, Mr. Macdonald—and a very beautiful place, too: all those places on the Clyde are beautiful, with the mountains behind them, and the splendid opening out to sea. The heroine, she was called Shena Dhonn Coire-Chathaidh, and she afterwards became a Mrs. Black, and lived to a great age. Her grandfather, her father, and herself had in succession the farm of Coire-Chathaidh. I suppose Shena Dhonn was a great beauty: I wonder if she knew she was to become famous in Highland song. And sometimes I wonder if that other Mrs. Black, who was Byron's 'Maid of Athens,' could have foreseen the place she was to take in English literature. It might have consoled her a little bit, for she died in poor circumstances. And I wonder if any of those Highland girls suspected that their praises would be sung long after they were dead. Eilidh Bhàn, Mairi Lagach, Mo nighean donn bhoidheach, and the rest of them: I suppose they did not know; most likely they were daughters of well-to-do farmers; and the poet was a mere shepherd-lad or a fisher-lad, who durst not look so high; and he went away, of course; and the young lady of the farm married and forgot him, and spent the rest of her life in looking after her children. Mr. Macdonald, shouldn't there be a national fund for subsidising indigent lovers? We spend heaps of money

in providing for other imbeciles: why not for these poor dears?"

And so she blethered on, this wise lass, until she had got him into a right cheerful mood again; and there was no more singing of Highland songs; no more of Shena Dhonn or Ailie Ban; she soon had him laughing over her idle stories and her silly reminiscences; until, indeed, there came out again from the inn Somerled Macdonald—Somerled, with the grave, obedient, earnest eyes.

She might have had a word for him, but she had not; while he on his part, when he had to address her, did so in a respectful and distant fashion, as if they were strangers. She was giving herself entirely to the old man; and she had got into a merry and reckless mood; she was telling him the most horrible lies about her own juvenile experiences in these very wilds. And then her busy brain was full of ridiculous projects and schemes—not merely for the subsidising of indigent lovers and other imbeciles: she wanted, for example, a monument raised to the unknown epigrammatists who had enriched the world with their anonymous phrases.

"Why not?" said she. "Don't they deserve it? We allow a self-advertising Yankee to disfigure an old-fashioned English town like Stratford-on-Avon by putting up a preposterous drinking-fountain in his own honour; and yet we haven't the simplest tablet recording our gratitude to those benefactors of the human race. Could we exist now without such sayings as 'That depends on the liver,' 'Getting no forrarder,' and the immortal 'Don't!' And yet there is no monument! Why is there no monument? These are the people who make life

happier by simply a chance phrase or a word; the people in Parliament jabber for hours, and the chief good they do is to make you profoundly grateful you are not compelled to read their jabberwocking. Oh, by the way, I would have one side of the monument devoted to authors who are well-known—like Mr. Lewis Carroll. Why, he has increased the English language! How could we live without 'The Walrus and the Carpenter'?——"

And so she jabberwocked, did this sagacious young lass; and sometimes she would prop up the cushion behind his head; and sometimes she would touch his hand with her fingers; and sometimes she would tell him what was happening around them—in the air—on the loch—up by the steep slopes and corries of Ben Clebrig. The mother looked on, smiling. She knew the wiles of this creature. She also had been a victim.

Then there was a rattle of wheels on the road; it was the doctor going his rounds (of five-and-twenty miles diameter); and as there was a chill breath beginning to draw up from the loch, he advised them to have the invalid conveyed indoors. And when that had been done, when Somerled Macdonald re-appeared, there was no longer an engrossing centre of interest: he himself had to set to work to entertain those ladies, who were in a manner his guests.

"I hope," said he, rather shyly, to the younger of the two, "that Mr. Gilchrist finds his new occupation agreeable."

"Oh, yes," said she. "The very thing he could most have desired."

"And of course his position in Invernish will be rather a better one?" he ventured to ask again.

"Oh, yes," said she. "Not that Invernish is the boundary of his aspirations."

"Ah, I understand," he said. "The literary gift is an extraordinary thing. A man speaks with one voice, but millions upon millions listen to him. And then the friends he makes, everywhere. And the social passport, if he cares for that. It is better than being crowned. I suppose that an author who is widely read and admired knows within himself that he could sail into Hobart Town, or land in Chicago railway station, or steam up the Gulf of California, with the certainty of finding a hearty and generous welcome wherever he went. It is a wonderful gift. The owner of it is to be envied," he added, in rather an absent kind of way.

"It has its responsibilities," the Bean-an-Tighearn remarked.

"Yes, yes," he said, with conviction. "A man ought to keep his pen clean, as he would keep himself clean. Anything else is prostitution of the basest."

"I think I can answer for Archie Gilchrist," said Eelin, quietly, "if ever he should be fortunate enough to address so wide an audience."

The doctor now made his appearance; he was a youngish man, keen of eye, alert, and with features that showed he was inured to travel.

"I hope our coming here," said the gentle-voiced lady, "has not caused your patient fatigue."

"Oh, not the least—not the least!" said he. "Happiness makes for cure. I believe in that—more than in medicines. Happiness makes for cure. And you have made him very proud and happy; he can talk of nothing else but your visit; you have done him more good than

I could do. Only," he added, glancing at Somerled Macdonald, "I think it might be prudent if he were to rest for the remainder of the evening. If you ladies wouldn't mind dining by yourselves in the ordinary parlour."

"Certainly not, Doctor! Oh, by all means!" Mrs. Macdonald exclaimed. "And perhaps, if you are staying over the night, you would be so kind as to join us?"

"Many, many thanks," said the young medico, "but I'm off for Tongue now—and it's a long drive." He looked at Eelin Macdonald as he shook hands with her in saying good-bye; and she looked at him again, in her fearless fashion—with the eyes like the blue of the sea-wave: he would have something to recall and to think over, during the monotonous and lonely miles that lie between Alt-na-Traive and Tongue.

But they were to have another glimpse of old Allan Macdonald that night; for between eight and nine someone tapped at their parlour door, and was bidden to enter. It was Somerled Macdonald, and he was the bearer of a message, and yet why should he have been so diffident about it, and why the need of any preamble? His father, he said, was back in his own land, after many years; and he had been thinking of his young days; and—and, in short, would the two ladies come in to family worship?

"Oh, most willingly—most willingly," said the sweet-voiced Bean-an-Tighearn, rising at once. "Will you show us the way to your sitting-room?"

And so they followed him along the narrow passage, and here was old Allan Macdonald with his easy-chair drawn to the head of the table; and here was the tall

and fair-haired servant lass Caitriana, whom most people called Kate; and here was Angus that used to be water-bailiff on the Garva. Even with the newcomers, it was a small congregation, in this remote little hamlet buried amidst the great and silent and solitary hills: indeed there was something strange about the whole proceeding —in this lamp-lit room, with the consciousness of the vast surrounding darkness outside. The service was simple and brief enough. Mr. Macdonald began by repeating—with hardly a check or alteration of a word, so practised was his memory—a portion of the eighteenth chapter of Matthew—"At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" And then when he had finished the passage, he said "Let us now praise God by singing the CXXI. Psalm." It was a remarkable selection for a blind man to make—"I to the hills will lift mine eyes"—; but doubtless it was with other than physical eyes that he saw Ben Clebrig, and Ben Loyal, and the rest of them, now wrapped in the silence and solemnity of the night. But what startled one of the visitors was that the younger Macdonald led the singing—in a strong and sensitive baritone voice that had, of course, to be modulated to the limited space; and her own voice was feeble in joining in, because of her sense of wonder; she was listening all the time—and perhaps trembling a little. It was to the proudly pathetic tune of *Coleshill* that they sang:

"I to the hills lift mine eyes,
From whence doth come mine aid.
My safety cometh from the Lord,
Who heav'n and earth hath made.

Thy foot He'll not let slide, nor will
He slumber that thee keeps.
Behold, He that keeps Israel,
He slumbers not, nor sleeps."

They had no organ, nor any trained band of choristers, nor the pageantry of viol and drum; but the simple little service was effective enough—in the small, isolated, yellow-lit chamber set amongst the encompassing majesty of the mountains and the darkness and the stars. And then with mutual good wishes they parted and went their several ways. But Eelin Macdonald had got something added to remember, when she was by herself, in the solitude of the midnight hours.

CHAPTER XVIII.

TOWN AND RIVER.

In a dingily-furnished apartment in a back lane in Invernish, a girl sate sewing, by the aid of a small paraffin lamp. She was not exactly plain, and she was not exactly pretty, but she had honest brown eyes and a pleasant expression of face. To her entered—without any ceremony of rapping or ringing—a grand young lady: a young lady of tall and elegant figure, and curly canary-coloured hair, and clever grey eyes; smartly dressed, too—satin shoes, black silk skirt, green cloth jacket trimmed with fur, fur also round her neck, kid gloves and lace cuffs, while the crowning of the edifice was a white straw hat with scarlet artificial poppies all complete. A gorgeous apparition to open the door of the poor sempstress's room; and this was her manner of speech, when she had taken the sole remaining chair.

"Jane Forsyth," said she, in tones of high indignation, "it just makes me sick to see you slavin and slavin here, night after night. When that animal Struthers chucked you, why didn't you sue him for a month's salary, and look about for another place? You'll never get another place, hidin in this hole, and slavin for the sweaters. One thing: the new-laid eggs and odds and ends your people send you from the country—I hope you're not such a fool as to pass them on to that young Gilchrist, now he's become a toff. I never heard of such a thing—a girl starving herself to feed a man, and not even telling him!"

"It was through me he lost his situation—"

"And now you've lost yours through him," was the instant rejoinder. "Oh, I know. I can see into a bally milestone as well as anybody; and after that affair Struthers took his first chanct and hoisted you out. I'd have slapped his jaw, I would, and winked my eye at the bloomin beak. Well, I hope there's to be no more secret passing-on of new-laid eggs and chickens. Oh, what a silly you are! I tell you, men are beasts. You trust me. I've seen enough of 'em. This child has had the scales taken off her eyes. You don't know. You've met only one here or one there. I've seen 'em in crowds, rushin' in and rushin' out. I haven't been for five years at Crewe Junction without picking up a notion or two. And I tell you, men are beasts. They'd give their mortal souls for a drink. They'd sacrifice their return tickets, and let their wife and children howl and cry around the station, anything for a drink: blimey if they often can't wait for the soda! One time it's gin, another time it's rum, in this town it's special Scotch—anything will do

for a gargle; and a fellow would leave his sweetheart on his wedding-day if anybody offered him a glass of fizz. I've had experience. I know what they are. And I know what they think they are—a slashin' lot of 'eroes: that's when they get on the booze and the bounce; and they'll lie and they'll lie fit to bust themselves; and it's poor women that's supposed to take in all their clack. M'yes! Perhaps. There's one young lady from the country who doesn't tumble to that clabber any more. I've heard too much of it. Oh, my gracious, they sometimes try to be funny!—and the old, old chestnuts they trot out!—for of course a barmaid is not supposed to have any brains; and the more maudlin the man becomes the more humorous he tries to be. It's a mercy the pig has to light his pipe sometimes, and that gives one a rest." She unpinned her hat, and pitched the flaming ornament on to the bed. "Here, give me that bally thing, and I'll have a shy at it: I tell you, you're wearing your eyes out!"

And she would have snatched the work away, only that Miss Forsyth refused.

"Much you know, Clara," she said, with a quiet giggle, "about hem-stitching and faggoting!"

"Oh, very well," said the other, carelessly, "burn your eyes out if you choose! But that wasn't what I came here about to-night. And I wouldn't tell you until I had made plain what my opinion of men amounted to. No: the girl who allows herself to think well of those creatures is a horrible ass. Simply a horrible ass. I say it, because I know it. If you had been at Crewe Junction for five years, you wouldn't be the noodle you are. However, that's not my affair. I'm not your Creator:

if I had been, I'd have made you up with more pluck than to send new-laid eggs anonymous-like, to any young man——"

"It was wicked of that old Mrs. Christie to tell you——"

"Oh, bless your simple heart, what is it that I don't hear!" exclaimed the resplendent damsel, from out of her surrounding of strong scent. "I am the general fountain of intelligence: that's the kind of person I am! But now to business. I've warned you as to what men are: and yet, if you have any fancy for that sneaking fellow Gilchrist—oh, my goodie, he's an Editor—we'll have to call him Mr. now—well, you'd better look out, my dear innocent dove, for they're going to do him a mischief. Yes, they are. To-morrow morning, first thing. They've found out all about his ways——"

"But who, Clara, but who?" cried the frightened and bewildered little sempstress.

"Why, the bruisers up from Glengarva!—them that was livin' at Bridge of Kinvaig. They're the curse of the town! They were in at the bar to-night—blind. I wouldn't serve them: not me: no, I wouldn't: but they were so blind full that they kept on jawing and jawing; and I can tell you this little pitcher has long ears, though it didn't concern me much. To-morrow morning —out by the Islands—that's the kind of idea they have; only the blind-drunk idiots may sleep it all off—how can I tell? What I know is that they mean to do the young man a mischief; and they've learned up all about his ways; and most likely to-morrow morning it will be; and if someone doesn't give him a tip, he'll be reduced to a pulpy mass. Twig? Oh, you needn't look so

scared. I'd go and warn him myself; but at this time o' night, it wouldn't look quite respectable, would it? Well, I've done my duty," continued the clever-eyed maiden, as she took up her hat and pinned it on again. "Mind, I wouldn't interest myself much in any man, if I was you. It doesn't pay. If they interest themselves in you, yes, I'll allow that's better business. Good-night, Janey: you've hard lines of it with that—what do you call it—faggoting? but you ain't got to get up at such a bally hour in the morning as I have."

And so the exuberant damsel, with her kid gloves, and her scarlet poppies, and her fierce atmosphere of perfume, took her departure, leaving poor little Janet Forsyth in a sad state of alarm. For she also had heard something of this gang of prize-fighters—indeed they had become notorious in the town; and she knew quite well what were Archie Gilchrist's habits, and upon her it now devolved to give him warning. So at once she went to bed, hoping to wake early enough to go out to the Islands. But she could not sleep. Hour after hour passed, in a torture of apprehension; she tried to get rest, for she wanted to be along by the river at day-break; yet no rest came to her, as the nearest church from time to time sent its funeral note into the night. And then, just as she ought to have been getting up, exhausted nature claimed its due, and she sank into slumber tossed about by dreams and terrors.

And meanwhile the dawn was declaring itself over the Islands, in the mysterious silence that prevails before the awakening of human life. There was a faint, indescribable odour of autumn in the still air; there was an autumn haze hovering about the woods; there was

an autumn sprinkling of yellow and crimson in the foliage—when one had found sufficient daylight to see. And yet the ineffable procession from grey to lilac, and from opalescent lilac to rose, and from wild flaming rose to a wonder of gold, was a gradual and almost unnoticeable thing: a young man seated out here—on the bench carved with the initials of many bygone lovers—facing the multitudinous glint of the silver-racing stream—and busy with his books, might be pardoned for not observing the still progress of the hours. All the world around him appeared to be asleep. The green Venetian blinds of Glengarva House—far over there beyond the chasing current—were down. Fergus had not yet begun his thrashing of the pools. Nay, if Little Isabel of the Bannocks had uttered her plaintive call from the neighbouring heights, should he not have heard, in despite of the incessant hushed clamour of the weir?

It was not Little Isabel of the Bannocks who disturbed Archie Gilchrist's studies. Absorbed as he was in these books and pamphlets—they had mostly reference to the volume on Hector Macneill and Tannahill that he and Eelin Macdonald proposed to publish in collaboration—absorbed as he was, he heard heavy steps behind him. And then his privacy was invaded; several men—at whom he hardly glanced—taking their places on this wooden bench. But that was right enough. The Islands are free to the public. If a student chooses to make them a place for work or for wistful meditation, he must run the risk of being intruded upon. And so familiar was Archie Gilchrist with these obvious conditions that, when the strangers appeared he bundled up the papers

that had been lying beside him, and stuffed them into his pocket, so that no one should be incommoded.

Matters, however, soon assumed a different aspect. He had simply ignored the presence of the newcomers—being, as it chanced, entirely engaged with "The Links of Forth, or a Parting Peep at the Carse of Stirling"; but they seemed determined to thrust themselves on his attention. They crowded him up to the end of the bench; and he made way for them, inch by inch, until their purpose of insult could be no longer mistaken. Then he turned. He saw who the brutes were; he knew who they were; they had established a reputation for themselves in and around Invernish. And by this time Archie Gilchrist's blood was all aflame. If he were to be crowded one other inch along the seat, the nearest of the bullet-headed ruffians would find a thunderbolt between his eyes.

"Look here, young man, are ye fond o' swimmin'?" said the one who had crushed up most closely.

The taunting tone was unmistakable.

"Mind your own business!" said Gilchrist, and he got his left fist clenched.

The fool took no heed.

"Oh, my, aint 'e 'aughty!" he exclaimed, derisively. "A gent as is a gent, and no error! He wants the 'ole of the bench, does 'e, all to hisself? Well, I never eerd of sich cheek! I never did, all my bloomin' days. The 'ole of the bench he wants, my eyes! I'm fair ashamed. Fair ashamed! Them's manners! The 'ole of the bloomin' bench——" And then the silly idiot was so imprudent as to try to jog Gilchrist off the bench altogether. It

was far from prudent. It was quite the reverse of prudent. For the next moment he had got Gilchrist's fist planted clean and square into the midst of his ugly physiognomy, and he went sprawling into the stones. Unfortunately, he was only one of several. Archie Gilchrist sprang up; but he was immediately surrounded. Before he knew what was happening, his arms had been pinioned and roped behind him; and he found himself being hustled and jostled over the gravel, and through the grass, and down by the bushes, until he was flung headlong into the river.

The strange thing was that the last object he saw before the waters crashed over his face was Glengarva House—away on the other side of the stream. So still and peaceful it appeared: the sun beginning to tell on the red sandstone and the green blinds—the trees on the terrace hardly moving in the morning air. It was a sort of farewell glimpse—of astonishing vividness; it seemed to him as if he were saying good-bye; for the rushing current was lapping and battering all about his head, and his hands were tied behind him, and he was being swept along to the Devil's Kirn.

But natural instinct asserted itself: there was no sentimental thought of Glengarva House and its green blinds when he found that he could shoot out his legs; and he was an excellent swimmer; when he had knocked the foam from his eyes, and got a gasping breath of air, he did not even fear the Devil's Kirn. At least he had no time for fear, or for thinking about fear; because the heavy current hurled him along, and all he craved for was another mouthful of air—only another mouthful, and he thought he might find safety somewhere, bound as

he was. He was being thrown about like a drowned cat. And yet he fought and fought; and blew the water out of his mouth; and hoped for mercy; and had some vague remembrance of the deep black eddy where the Devil's Kirn curls under the hazel and alder and rowan bushes. And then again he did not care. It seemed hardly worth the struggling for. And there, facing the clear-lit dawn (his splashed eyes could not see, but well he knew where the red house was, and the ivy, and the black araucaria, and the garden-plots aglow and fragrant) there was one who might be rather glad of this release. No, he did not care (this was when the water was choking him, and he felt deadly faint). He only wanted to say good-bye. The red house and the glistening ivy and the shimmering trees on the terrace were all invisible to him; and yet he thought of saying good-bye. O Heavens, if the green Venetian blind were to be drawn up—if a face and eyes and hair too wonderful for aught but distant worship were to appear there—if for one last moment he might have a glimpse of all he had hoped for on earth—this stupefaction that was overpowering him would have been more endurable—would almost have been joyous in a wild kind of way.

And then the hurling swirl of the Devil's Kirn took him and swept him in to the black back-water; and yet again, exhausted as he was, he instinctively strove for his life; and when he found that a rowan branch was just over his head—trailing in the stream indeed—he seized the lowest leaves with his teeth, and held. Another kick or two, and he got a firmer grip, and held, and held, and now he was recovering his breath somewhat. But it did not seem to him that this clinging on

to existence was of any more use. Why not let things go? No one would miss him. There was the old woman up at Dingwall; but she also was about ready to depart; and they might meet elsewhere. And then he lost consciousness.

When he partially came to himself he was lying on the bank, close by the bushes, and there was a young girl stooping over him, and tending him, and weeping bitterly. But her tears were not as bitter as her self-reproach.

"Oh, Mr. Gilchrist," she was saying, as she pressed back the wet hair from his forehead, and with rubbing sought to restore some life to the icy hands, "it was all my fault. Can you hear me? It was all my fault. I was told they were going to do you harm. And I overslept. And I came running all the way, first to your house, and then out here. Oh, Mr. Gilchrist, will you ever forgive me? And what am I to do now? Maybe I should go into the town for a cab—oh, I can run—I am not a bit breathless or tired—oh, yes, I can run——"

But here her sobbing overtook her again, and she could do nothing but persistently chafe the cold hands.

And then when he had pulled himself together a bit further, and saw who this was who was bending over him, he said in a sudden terror—

"Oh, Miss Forsyth, I'm late with the keys!"

And still she tried to reanimate the poor limp hands; and she was saying to him—

"Oh, never mind the keys! You forget. You're

not in Struthers's shop now. You've got nothing to do with keys."

His senses were returning.

"Who pulled me out?" he said.

"I did," she answered him—perhaps with some faint glimmer of triumph after all.

"And the cords—who cut them?"

"Well, I did," the intrepid little sempstress said: he could not see her small housewife-case, with its scissors and such things, lying on the grass close by.

Then, when life came well back to him, he exclaimed in astonishment—

"But you are all wet! Oh, I understand—hauling me out! Ah, well, you might have let me go. But that's nothing. Will you hide yourself in the bushes, and I will run in to the town for a cab?"

"But it's you—it's you that I'm thinking of," she said, making a brave effort to subdue her sobbing. "For it was all my fault. Will you ever forgive me? I sate up the whole night through: and then to fall asleep just when I should have been here——"

"Oh, don't talk like that," he made answer to her as he struggled to his feet—she still tending him in a helpless, affectionate kind of way—trying to get the water out of his sodden clothes—binding her handkerchief round his neck—and so on; and again he pantingly said—

"No, don't talk like that! For you know you have saved my life—though whether it was worth the doing is another matter. And it's you that I am anxious about. You must keep walking. Come away—unless you're

afraid to face the people of Invernish with such a drowned scarecrow as I am."

"Much I care for the people of Invernish!" said she. "And it's you that must keep walking."

And so they set out; and perhaps she was a little proud of having saved him from destruction; for she was laughing and making merry over their sad plight; though, when a cab did present itself (the driver had taken General Mallock out to the Laggan stretch of the Nish, and was now returning along the Dores road) she was glad enough to accept its shelter; and in this fashion the bedraggled pair were taken to their respective homes.

When the old woman who looked after Archie Gilchrist's straw-thatched cottage—for he had not had time as yet to look for another house—when she opened the door, she gaped and stared at him as if he had been a warlock. He passed by her astonishment.

"See here, Mrs. Christie," he said, "you must go along at once to Struthers's shop in Union-street, and get the address of Miss Forsyth who is employed there, and you must seek her out at her lodgings, and do everything you can for her. Port-wine negus and bed and blankets—that's about the programme. Do everything for her you can think of—".

"But what has happened, sir?" the old woman said, with eyes staring at the wet clothes. "Miss Forsyth was here this mornin, rinnin like a hare, askin for ye, sir, ay, and greetin and greetin; and off she set again, like one demented, when I tellt her ye had gaen up the watter. And is it possible ye dinna ken that the young lass has left Struthers's shop—ay, ay, she was pitten oot, from a' that I can hear; and is it possible ye never jaloused

wha it was that left the new-laid eggs for ye, or the aipples for cookin, or the bit rabbit or chicken nows and again? And I've held my tongue long enough. It's jist peetiful to see such kindness—and no notice taken—"

"Do you mean to say it was Miss Forsyth who was leaving these secret little presents?" he demanded.

"Ay, and who else?" she retorted sturdily. "And I promised not to tell. But if there's any harm come to her—"

"No, no, no, there is none," said he, hastily. "But she hauled me out of the river, and of course she got wet, and I want you to go along and do everything you can for her. Everything! Get her to bed, first of all; and then port-wine negus—perhaps with a little cinnamon in it—and hot, you know, hot; you can buy the bottle of port-wine in Church-street; and the best, you know, Mrs. Christie, the best—"

"But what about yourself, sir?" the elderly housekeeper protested.

"Oh, that's all right," he said, impatiently. "I will change as soon as you've gone. But mind you do everything you can for Miss Forsyth; and when you come back, you might give me a hint as to her circumstances, if she has lost her situation. Quick, quick, now, Mrs. Christie! See that there's a fire in Miss Forsyth's room; and plenty of blankets on the bed; do everything you can think of—I lippen to you, you know—"

And so he despatched the old dame on her errand; and then, all dripping as he was, he sate down in the cane chair. There were many things to summon out of his memory—the hitherto unexplained presentation of

cooking-apples, for example, and new-laid eggs, with an occasional fowl or rabbit; and all these pointing to stealthy and secret visits that had been so carefully hidden from him. Yes, and there was more than that he could recall: he could also recall the quiet modesty of a pair of timid brown eyes.

CHAPTER XIX.

"THE WAY TO WOO."

It was fortunate for Archie Gilchrist that his dip in the Devil's Kirn did him no appreciable harm, for it was on the evening of this same day he had promised to dine with the ladies of Glengarva House. He was to be the only guest; and on such informal occasions he was accustomed to go out at an early hour: there were literary matters to discuss and arrange with Miss Eelin; or the three of them would walk along the terrace fronting the river; sometimes, as the dusk fell, the spectral white boat would silently glide into the scene, with Lily Neile, the phantom lady, wielding her almost invisible salmon-rod, and calling back to them in a voice not usually possessed by phantoms. And sometimes Lily Neile, oft-protesting, could be induced to become a fourth at dinner—despite her fishing attire. What did they care about her fishing attire? She was a merry lass, and excellent company.

But on this particular afternoon it did not seem as if there were to be any strollings up and down the quiet tennis-lawn (with voices heard far across the stream) for throughout the day the heavens had been heavy and lowering, with vaporous darkenings now and again, and

even at times a menace of rain. As he passed by the Castle hill, and looked over to the row of tall elms, there was no animation in their foliage, nor yet in the purple skies visible through the branches; further along the curving stretch of water in which that morning he had fought for his life seemed remote and obscure: the pervading gloom appeared to say that the night was not far off. Nevertheless it is the unexpected that happens in these latitudes. He had just got across the smaller suspension-bridge when there was a wild breaking up in the west; the sky overhead cleared as if by magic; and level golden beams shot across to warm into colour the wooded heights in the east. The golden radiance grew and grew, until there was a full flood of it—on the banked-up gardens, on the masses of oak and ash and rowan, and on one loftily-perched and gabled house, the shining windows of which sent down upon the now awakened river a blaze of reflections in brilliant saffron-white, among the soft, oily olive-greens. The world had undergone a sudden transfiguration. There was a laughter of children coming home from their blackberrying; no doubt they had been out all day among the russet and dark-green bushes, with the glossy fruit glistening luscious here and there, and here and there a dog-rose hip shining red at the apex of its leafless stem. And as the wonder and glory increased all around him, and as the strange light burned along those steep slopes on the other side of the stream, he began to think it possible that the ladies of Glengarva House might have been drawn forth from their occupations, to survey this suddenly resplendent picture. It is not every evening one finds a universe on fire—after a day of lead.

His conjecture was right: Eelin and her mother were out on the terrace, under the canopy of lime, and elm, and maple, and they were looking away to the other side, where the hanging foliage still caught the wild glare. And then, as they were regarding the river, it was but natural, when he joined them, that he should tell them of his adventure of the morning—nor making too much of it either. The two ladies received the news in a very different fashion. The gentle Bean-an-Tighearn was full of sympathy and also alarm; he must avoid going to these unfrequented neighbourhoods at such early hours; perhaps if someone—had been annoyed by something that had appeared in the Invernish *Observer* —perhaps a little inquiry—and representation—

Wild Eelin was of another mind.

"It is perfectly abominable," she said, in passionate indignation, "that such a thing should happen in a civilised country. Only it isn't a civilised country wherever Lord Mountmahon's gang are let loose. And it is Lord Mountmahon you must aim at, Archie; he set them on. I am convinced; I would rather let these crop-eared bull-dogs go altogether than that he should escape. For of course there will be a prosecution?"

"Oh, most certainly," said he. "The cabman driving in along the Dores road met them running off, and can identify them. But that's not the question—I want to get at their employer——"

"Their employer is Lord Mountmahon!" she exclaimed again. "Everybody knows it. These poor wretches only work for his pay; they could have no possible grudge against you. Whereas, he might."

"Well, yes, he might," responded Gilchrist, with a

bit of a laugh, "for I was nearly throwing him out of my office-room the other day. On the whole, there is something to be said for their side of the question, you know. They may contend that I began it; for before they tied my arms I hit one of them 'quite a hard knock' between the eyes: I'm afraid he won't see so well for some time to come. But there is no doubt the whole affair was preconcerted: I can show that: the broken-noses were bragging the night before, in a refreshment-room, of the exploit they had in hand; and I've got the cord I was bound with—it is brand new—"

"But Mountmahon—Mountmahon—how are you going to reach him?" said Eelin, with fierce vengeance in her tones.

"I'm afraid it won't be easy," said he, quite good-naturedly, "unless a five-pound note were to tempt one of the bullet-heads to blab—"

"Oh, Mr. Gilchrist," entreated the sweet-voiced, elderly lady, "have nothing more to do with them! Leave them alone! They will only do you more injury. You will never be able to prove that Lord Mountmahon instigated them; and, you see, they are many, and you are only one; do not mind what Eelin says—she is always so vindictive if a friend of hers is harmed in any way; you must not pay any heed to her—"

"I know what I should do if I were a man," said Eelin, turning proudly away.

"What, make for Mountmahon straight and without any form of law," said Gilchrist, laughing. "Well, it may come to that. Stranger things have happened."

By this time the gates of the golden west were slowly closing; the window-panes of the gabled house

on the heights had lost their fire; the river had sunk in tone, and a pale mist began to creep along the valley; the hanging woods were no longer of a burnished splendour, they had become dead, and cold, and distant; finally, through the almost invisible foliage, there shot a sudden ray of orange—the first of the lamps. And presently, behind them, a gong sounded: when they turned they found that the drawing-room was all aglow, and no doubt the dining-room was also lit up, though the blinds were down. And so they went indoors; they did not wait to see whether the Grey Lady was going to fish the ghostly shadows of the Devil's Kirn.

The poor, timid, sweet-voiced hostess had not too easy a time of it at this modest banquet. For the truth is, she never had acquired any great sympathy for rustic lovers, or, at least, for their appearances in print; and when Miss Eelin and her sworn champion were raving with enthusiasm about this piece or that piece—some pathetic wail at parting—some cry of despair in absence—some tender recollections of youthful days and scenes, with Jeanie, or Mary, or Phemie the queen and heroine of the never-to-be-forgotten dales and woods—she could only interfere with a quiet wonder, and now and again with a trifle of gentle sarcasm.

"Why should the young man," she asked, as she had asked on previous occasions, "make such a public protest of his determination to wed a particular young woman; and why, when she jilts him, or he has to go away, should he ask the public to bewail his bitter loss?"

"Why?" said Archie Gilchrist. "Because these are the tragedies of life; and of course they occur more

frequently among people in straitened circumstances than among the wealthier classes, who can choose their mates at leisure—and perhaps with indifference. The heart of the peasant-poet burns hot, and he must tell his tale. He does not appeal to the wealthier classes. If they care to buy his book, or to regard him, for a brief while, as a social curiosity, well and good; but it is the sympathy of his fellows that he wants—he wants to hear one of his songs sung by a servant-lass as she is at work in the fields."

"Yes," said Miss Eelin, chiming in, "and surely these songs are more true to human nature—more true to life and human experience than the theatrical bemoanments of Lord Byron or the love-twitterings of Tommy Moore?"

"Oh, very well," said the mother, smiling. "As long as your rustic sweethearts don't call themselves Chloe and Corydon I can bear with them."

And so they went on disputing, asserting, and contradicting—yet not with much ill-humour; and when Byron, or Moore, or anyone else got a chance slap it was with but a laughing sort of malice; there was no finality of judgment in these paradoxical flouts. And Hector Macneill was duly belauded—in a more sincere fashion; and Tannahill had his meed of pity; for these, after all, were the two subjects that more nearly concerned the budding authors.

Then they went into the drawing-room—with its long, rose-tinted curtains and its shaded lamps placed here and there; but when tea had been served the mother most considerately asked to be excused, saying that she had some letters to write; so that Archie Gilchrist and

Eelin of the sea-blue eyes, and the bunched-up black hair, and the fearless demeanour, were left by themselves. She crossed over to the piano, and sate down, and he followed her, and stood by.

"What would you like me to play for you?" she asked—and her fingers, idling over the keys, wandered into Tschaikowsky's Chanson Triste. Well, he could not answer her. For though this music was a kind of music quite unfamiliar to him, he had enough of the artist-sense to feel it, and to feel it deeply. The divine melancholy of this strain—now hushed, and low, and penetrating, and now louder, and with an appeal that rent the heart—quite overcame him: in his bewilderment he tried to liken it to other things: it was the cry of some poor lost soul, in the night, on the seaboard, calling for comrades that answered not; it was the voice of some mystic invisible choir in the heavens interceding for compassion and pity on the sons of men. If life could be so attuned, would not existence become a prolonged rapture—and yet inexpressibly sad, and mournful, and unearthly? The voice of the invisible choir came from a great distance. The lost creature crept forlorn along lonely shores in the dark. And then, again, he thought he was listening to some proud salutation of adieu, as the crowds of hapless lovers, through all the centuries, passed, not unwillingly, to their doom. Why, this was a pæan in praise of the *belle dame sans merci*. It was a joyous song of victory—though in some inexplicable heartrending fashion. The dead and dying made no protest; nay, they pledged her—those of them who could lift up a hand; they pledged her, even with their blanched faces and distraught eyes; and there was

no thought of reproach. And as for the *belle dame sans merci,* why, she went singing on her way! Perhaps she could not hear those proud and faint farewells.

The sudden silence startled him back to his senses.

"It is very beautiful," he said. "Oh, yes, it is very beautiful—but—but it sounds so far away—yes—as far away—as you are from me, Eelin."

There was a sob in his voice. She looked up in surprise.

"I have something to say to you, Eelin," he went on, and instinctively she rose, and accompanied him to the small central table where there was a better light, and they took their places. She did not seem much alarmed: perhaps he had a new literary scheme to unfold. Tschaikowsky's Chanson Triste, exquisite as it is, could not have moved him to any sudden resolve.

"Eelin," said he, in a breathless kind of way, "the relations between you and me are very strange, and I sometimes think it is my fault. I have tried to imagine what you desired, and perhaps—well, perhaps I have been mistaken—and—and the result does not seem to me quite natural. Don't misunderstand me. I will be to you just whatever you wish; and I don't complain; only, I may have made a mistake. I may have gone too far in the other direction. Only—only—you must tell me; and I will be to you as you wish me to be; and never complain—oh, no, not that: why should I complain after having met with such undeserved great fortune?" And then again he said, following up these incoherent sentences: "Eelin, there was mention at dinner of Hector Macneill's 'The Way to Woo'—do you remember the last verse?"

Surely it was not the rose-tint of the curtains that was answerable for this quick suffusion of colour? Well she remembered the lines. They speak of a young lad who has come a long way to see a young lass, and who beseeches her to tell him how best to woo her; the conclusion of the matter being as follows:

"She hid her fair face in her true lover's bosom;
The saft tear of transport filled ilk lover's e'e;
The burnie ran sweet by their side as they sabbit,
And sweet sang the mavis abune on the tree.
He clasped her, he pressed her, he ca'd her his hinnie,
And aften he tasted her hinnie-sweet mou';
And aye, 'tween ilk kiss, she sighed to her Johnnie,
Oh laddie! oh laddie! weel weel can ye woo!"

Perfectly she remembered the lines; and she became a little apprehensive.

"You know, Eelin," said he, "we are supposed to be engaged lovers, and yet you have never granted me one kiss. Perhaps I have misunderstood you. Perhaps I have taken you too literally—"

"Oh, no—oh, no, indeed!" she answered him hastily. "Indeed no! You have been so considerate!—you have been so generous—and kind! Because—because—well, I may not be like other girls—and it may be quite unnatural—and quite blameable too—but I rather shrink from the caresses that one reads of in books. And you have been so considerate—oh, so very generous and considerate!—I have been so grateful to you! I had looked forward to a sort of literary copartnership—my helping you in my poor way—looking out for any references, or anything of that kind—"

"But, Eelin," he said, gravely, "our engagement, if it is to continue at all, must end in marriage; and mar-

riage isn't made up of magazine-articles. And I have been thinking—you cannot tell with what bitterness I have been thinking!—that there is something wrong. You are as far away from me as that beautiful music you were playing. And why should I tie you down to an undertaking made in a moment of thoughtlessness—"

With that she got up from her chair, and stood facing him.

"Then you reject me," she said, in a low tone, and with her eyes cast down. "You reject me—"

He instantly rose and caught her hand.

"Don't talk like that, Eelin!" he implored of her. "I—reject you? It is madness to think of such a thing! But—but—if I were to release you?—"

"When I make a promise," said the girl, "it is my nature to keep it, and I wish for no release. But then—but then—if I am thought unworthy—"

"Eelin!" he exclaimed, and straightway he would have caught her to his arms and kissed and kissed her into a compliant mood, only that in some mysterious way she shrank from his embrace, and he understood, and mutely obeyed. "Let it be as you will, then," he said, despairingly. "I may have gone the wrong 'way to woo'—I may be more fortunate by-and-by."

"Oh, you have been so considerate!" she cried again. "How can I show my gratitude to you? But perhaps I may yet—perhaps I may yet—who knows?" And with that she took his hand and touched it with her lips; and that was the only suggestion of endearment that had so far taken place between these two lovers.

In due course he said good-bye, and set out on his

homeward way. The river was dark, yet not quite so dark as the black suspension-bridge that spanned it. But Oh! the wild white wonder of the starlit heavens—the distant and throbbing worlds to which mortals have given transitory names—Andromeda, with her shackles broken, and now serene and afar—Cassiopeia, with her trembling jewels that burned in the night: they were all so beautiful, but so sadly remote! Perhaps, in those unknown lands, the Chanson Triste would be part of the mystic language hovering in the air: here, in this common world, it seemed only to speak of heartbreaking and misery and farewell. He did not understand. He wished to do his best. But he was consumed by a great love; and those starlit heavens—why, he did not know—appeared to convince him of the hopelessness of it all.

CHAPTER XX.

A MORNING PLUNGE.

Now while as yet the new day was hidden by the eastern hills, and all the world appeared to lie asleep, a black vehicle was quietly driven up to the front of General Mallock's railings, and almost simultaneously Wild Eelin and Morag the Mull lass issued from Glengarva House, shutting the door noiselessly behind them. And Eelin, in stealthy whispers, was trying to reassure her handmaiden.

"There is really no risk, Morag," she said in those hushed undertones. "And it is of great importance for everyone to know what to do when flung into the sea. You might stumble off a paddle-box, you know, or a rowing-boat might be capsized; and you ought to be

prepared. And there is no risk, Morag; for I am going to save your life; only, you must not grip me. You leave me alone, and I'll bring you out of the water all right. But don't grip me. Just imagine you are drowned, and quite helpless, and you'll see how I'll hoist you over the gunwale. I don't think you can possibly catch cold; for it will only be an affair of a few minutes; and in this bag there is everything that can be wanted for a change; and the cab will be waiting to bring us back to the house. You're not frightened, are you, Morag?"

"N—no, Miss," said the Mull lass, with her teeth chattering; the morning air was somewhat chill.

"Because you have courage to put aside all the havers that old Maxwell tells you, about Haggart the murderer and his breaking of jails; and I'm sure you'll be brave enough for this enterprise—when it will be of great practical service to everyone concerned."

Morag said nothing: she was rather a timid lass; and she did not quite understand. But now they were arrived at the black vehicle, from the inside of which Lily Neile spoke blithely:

"How are you, old girl? All serene? Let Morag go on the box, and take your bag with her; for I've got one in here, and it's tol-lol biggish—just in case you may want to save me too—for who knows what accident may occur?—and a dry pair of Harris stockings makes all the difference betwixt a man and a mouse. Good morning, Morag!—heard anything of David Haggart's ghost whizzing about of late? Bundle up, now; and let's be off."

And so they drove away through the night—with here and there an orange gas-lamp piercing the dark-

ness; and inside the cab Lily Neile and Eelin were singing to themselves, but in carefully diminished tones

"A boat, a boat, haste to the ferry,
For we are going to Altnaherry."

They passed the lights of Invernish; all the town was dead in slumber; not a dog barked. They went down by Friars' Place and Capel Inch to Thornbush Quay, and still the refrain kept coming and going in fitful snatches—

"A boat, a boat, haste to the ferry,
For we are going to Altnaherry."

But surely there was some indication of the new day? When they got along to the harbour, the masts of a schooner, lying listed over on the mud, could vaguely be made out against the eastern sky; and Cromwell's Fort was dimly visible; and there was a suggestion of land beyond the unknown belt of sea—no doubt, the Black Isle emerging from its mists. At length the cab was stopped; the three of them descended; and down by the bank they found a substantial gig moored to a post. Clearly all this had been arranged; for the oars were in the boat, and the padlock had been removed from the chain; and so the voyagers took their leave of the land. Lily Neile and Eelin were rowing; and the new refrain was—soprano and contralto—with ineffable anguish intermingled—

"Though I leave thee now in sorrow,
Smiles may light our love to-morrow,
Doomed to part, my faithful heart
A gleam of joy from hope shall borrow.
Ah, ne'er forget, when friends are near,
This heart alone is thine for ever;

Thou may'st find those will love thee dear,
But not a love like mine, O never!"

And now behold! the dawn was beginning to disclose itself over the wide Moray Firth. There was a grey shimmering on the water; the air smelt keen; arrowy flights of sea-birds swept by; the long promontory of Fort George could be made out, by anyone familiar with the line of the coast. And still these two pulled on, in fine rhythmical swing; and now and again they repeated their pathetic bewailment

"Though I leave thee now in sorrow"

—or perhaps it was

"I would that my love could silently"

—anything, in short, that their fresh young voices found in unison; while all the world seemed gradually to awake; and the houses and Castle hill of Invernish showed sombre under the ever-increasing canopy of pale blue smoke. It was the Black Isle that appeared first to catch the new day. There were yellow clearances and dark plantations, and an occasional white cottage: they looked human-like, and welcome, and friendly, beyond the forlorn and leaden waste of sea. Poor Morag, seated in the stern of the boat, was wishing herself back in Tobermory again, or on any similiar and serviceable piece of land.

In truth, Morag was crying, and Lily Neile, rowing stroke, was the first to perceive the fact.

"Why, Morag, what is the matter?" she called to her. "Are you afraid?"

"Oh, no, Miss, I am not afrait," said Morag, wiping her eyes and trying to stifle her sobs. "And whatever

Miss Eelin is wishing me to do, well, I am willing to do —Kott knows that——"

"But what on earth are you crying about?" said the frank-spoken Lily Neile—and by this time the increasing light could reveal to her with what skill she was feathering her oar.

"Well, before I left Tobbermorry," said the agitated lass, "my mother was warning me not to get into dancher——"

"Oh, you silly ass," said Lily Neile, goodnaturedly, "there is no danger at all. Don't you know that Miss Macdonald can swim like an otter? But you needn't disturb yourself. I am going to take your place. It's my life that Miss Macdonald will save, and yon can remain comfortably in the boat. Do you understand that, now? You just sit where you are. Only, you can reach us an oar if you see we are drowning."

"Lily," Eelin Macdonald protested, "this isn't part of the bargain. If Morag is frightened, we can get somebody else, some other morning. But you have no change of clothes——"

"Oh, yes, I have," said Miss Neile, who was a young person of great courage in all these girlish adventures. "I came prepared: nobody ever knows what's going to happen: in that bag is everything both of us could want. Morag can sit in the boat. Eelin, Eelin," she cried, tauntingly, "is it you that's afraid? You that would jump down a tiger's throat to have a wrestle with him inside! Eelin Macdonald, afraid of anything: that would be a joke! Well, we're far enough now; save me or not, here goes. Back, bow, and get the way off her, for that's only playing fair. Are you ready, Nell? Opener sea

than this you don't want anywhere: it's a right-down honest trial."

"Look here, Lil," said the oarswoman at the bow, "I think I can undertake to keep you afloat for a minute or two—but no!—oh, no!—I cannot, and will not, undertake to recover your Tam o' Shanter."

"Ah, there's something in that," responded the wise maiden, and she began to withdraw her bonnet-pin. "You know, you're not such a fearful idiot as you look. There's a glimmer of common-sense about you sometimes—rarely—but sometimes. You're a microcephalous ape—but there's just a glimmer of sense about you sometimes—"

She placed her grey Tam o' Shanter in the stern.

"I suppose it will be horribly cold when I jump overboard?" she said, apprehensively. "But this is an honest trial, you know; because if I were to hear the ship crunch on to a rock—in the Red Sea, for example —I shouldn't be waiting in my cabin to pin on this blessed Tam. Bow in, there! Enough way! Oh, Eelin Macdonald, wouldn't it be too distressful if they were to see us from the shore, and put out in a boat to rescue us!"

Quite unconsciously she was undoing from her neck an eagle's claw set in silver that her mother had given her, and as unconsciously she stuck it into the Tam o' Shanter. Something was to be saved from the shipwreck.

"Lily," sald Wild Eelin, in a piteous kind of way, "I think we have made a mistake. There is no need for you, or for Morag either, to get wet through. I only wanted to show you how long one can keep in the

water with one's clothes on and I can do that well enough—so—so—you just stay where you are—and you'll get some idea of what happens when one is thrown into the sea unexpectedly. I will try to show you what is best to do."

"And you think I am such a ghastly sneak!" exclaimed the other, in open scorn. "Well, Lil, old woman, here's your work cut out for you!"—and with no further word of warning she placed one foot on the gunwale and flung herself over.

The seething water submerged her for not more than a second or two: here she was again, blowing the salt from her lips, and striking about with her hands.

"Oh, don't splash, Lil—don't splash! I'm coming for you!"—and with that Eelin of the sea-blue eyes (she also, had carefully removed her Tam) dropped over the side. In another moment she had got hold of her friend. "Mind you don't grip me, Lil!" she cried—when she had shaken her head like a Newfoundland dog—"I'm going to save you—I'm going to show you how it's done—but you must sham being insensible—and don't cling to me——"

Now that they were in the water, they found there was a rougher sea on than they could have anticipated, looking from the thwarts; and Eelin had to make a stiff fight for it. Worse than all, the set of the tide was steadily carrying the boat away; and that egregious fool of a woman, Morag, had no thought of putting the oars in the rowlocks, and moving in their direction: indeed she was petrified with fear. And meanwhile—well, no one who has not tried it can tell how terribly difficult it is to hold up another person in water, even for a few

seconds—meanwhile Eelin was struggling with her task; and if she was a Newfoundland dog in habit, she was a lioness in heart; she would not confess to herself that there was the slightest risk of danger; she gently plied her way—and Lily Neile was too alarmed to be otherwise than quiescent. The fool Morag let the boat drift. And now, for anyone battling for life—because that is what it had come to—there was an extraordinary vividness in all things visible around. Fort George was outlined against the sea-horizon. There was sunlight on the Black Isle, and on its yellow clearances. A small steamer making in for the Beauly Firth left a dingy trail of smoke behind it; but it was going away: there was no hope in that direction. And still Wild Eelin strove to give good heart to her faithful friend and ally.

"It's all right, Lil," she managed to say—when the ruffling waves would let her—"it's quite right—we shall be at the boat in a minute—then—then haul yourself in—don't—don't mind me—"

It really was in less than a minute thereafter that they reached the boat; but by this time Eelin was wholly exhausted, and her companion was not in much better case.

"Catch the gunwale, Lil—catch the gunwale!" she gasped. "I'm done. Good—"

It was all of "Good-bye!" that she could utter; the lapping waves came over her mouth; and when she had done her best to make sure of Lily Neile's safety, she fell away and disappeared—the weight of water in her clothes dragging her down. But Lily Neile was not such a fool as Morag. When she had scrambled into the boat, she breathlessly put an oar into a rowlock, and

with one or two rapid strokes shoved the bow round. And when Eelin, in some wild, distracted fashion, came to the surface again, making a final effort to gain a breath of air, well, then, Lily Neile was swift to snatch at the dishevelled blue-black tresses, and she held on —and held on—though she herself was about sinking into utter collapse; and still she held on, until she had got her companion dragged in over the gunwale. Morag's contribution to the performance was a continued fit of hysterical weeping—while the wonder of the dawn unfolded itself, and Fort George shone clear.

It was over the stern that Eelin was dragged in, and there for a few seconds she lay panting. But only for a few seconds. She pulled herself together.

"You see, Lily," she said, in disconnected sentences, "this was more than was bargained for. The boat drifted so far. But I've shown you how it is possible to hold up anyone in the water; and you were a brick —you never splashed—and you never clung. Oh, my, isn't it mortal cold!"

She was shivering.

"Take to your oar, Nell," said her friend, "and let's get back before the whole town of Invernish wakes up. The pulling will warm us."

And so they set to work; but now there was no pathetic "Though I leave thee now in sorrow," nor any invitation to go to Altnaherry; because both of them were quite conscious that they had been within easily measurable distance of secrets, of which they did not choose to speak.

"Lil, dear," said Eelin, when she had got well into the swing of her stroke, "it's all very pleasant to say

you can hold a drowning person up, but you've got to bargain beforehand that the drowning person shall be Lily Neile——"

"Oh, no thanks," said Miss Neile, through her icicled lips. "I know when I've had enough——"

"But you did it so well!" her companion protested. "You were just admirable. If you had clung round my neck, do you know where we should have been at this minute? Well, I don't; but it wouldn't have been in this here boat. Morag," she said again, "why didn't you put the oars in the rowlocks, and come a bit nearer us?"

"Oh, I could not do that, Miss Eelin, for fear of striking one of the young ladies," said Morag, who had recovered from her whimpering, "and it's not me that would be saving myself, if I could help—and I was trying to gain attention from the steamer——"

"And do you think we could have gone on board any steamer in this state of clothes?" Miss Eelin demanded —indeed, the two young ladies presented a humiliating spectacle.

But here was the cab still waiting for them on the bank of the river; and there were dry clothes for them to change into, while Morag perched herself up on the box. It is needless to suggest that they shut both windows—for the golden day was now spreading itself abroad, and the wavering blue smoke over the town declared that humanity was astir again. But Eelin said—

"Look here, old lass, is it any good our trying to change in this cramped-up place? You'd much better come straight home with me; and I'll get you some-

thing hot to drink, and you shall have my bed; and I can have a rug on the sofa. But it was worth doing, mind; it was worth doing; if ever you're flung into the sea again, just keep like that—oh, you're a splendid person to save; it's easy to do it with you. Why, they give exhibitions of people who can swim: they ought to give exhibitions of people who know how to be saved from drowning! And I'd back you—against the world! You did splash a bit at first, until I yelled to you."

"Nothing—nothing," said Lily Neile, who also was shivering in her sodden clothes. "The moment I felt your grip, I knew I was safe; and I lay like a lamb, and let you do what you liked."

"It's mercilessly cold, isn't it?" said the one trembling person to the other.

"It is a trifle chilly," answered Miss Neile. "But it's no good trying to change, for here we are at the Cathedral, and in another minute you'll see General Mallock smoking his morning pipe, outside his garden, and what would he think of us if he got a glimpse of us through the window? I'll take your offer, old crock, for I'm frightfully tired and cold; but I won't rob you of your bed; you give me a blanket, and I'll know what to do. And my folks won't worry, for I warned them I was going off on a skylark with a hideous maniac called Eelin Macdonald, and they'll be prepared for anything."

The sun was warm on the oak gate, and the gravel drive, and the red-stone frontage as they drove up; and as Morag was benumbed and mostly asleep, it was Jane, the parlour-maid (in terrible consternation) who had to look after these half-drowned scapegraces; and about

the last thing that Wild Eelin saw—after she had wrapped rugs and ulsters over her friend—was Fergus out in the silver-shining water, fishing over towards the Devil's Kirn. And for the moment she thought she would give ten years of her life away if only she could throw as beautiful a line as that.

CHAPTER XXI.

"THE BRAES OF GLENBRAON."

But when Eelin had put her friend to bed, and wrapped her up, and wished her happy slumbers, it did not occur to her to do anything of a similar kind for herself; because the morning was gloriously fine; and she was an eager, insatiable kind of creature; and out there in the sunlight she saw pedantic old Maxwell, at whom she could mock; moreover, and this was the most important, she knew a secret corner up by the wall of the kitchen-garden where there still lingered a few unconsidered raspberries, of which she could make an excellent breakfast. So she went into her dressing-room, and changed her attire, and passed stealthily from the house. The golden warmth and the fresh air were like wine to her. Now and again she shivered a little, but she took no notice.

As she was thieving the raspberries—reaching here and there at branches above her head—old Maxwell came along with his barrow, and he was so patronising as to linger for a moment.

"Well, Maxwell," said she, turning round, "have you discovered any more murder-stories to frighten the maids with? Why, man, you don't know the very groundwork

of that theory of yours! The transmotion of souls—what's that? Did you never hear of metempsychosis?"

The Scotch gardener looked suspicious. He was used to the jeers of this young madam.

"Why," she said, with her great blue eyes expressing profound astonishment, "it was a familiar doctrine thousands of years ago; all the great philosophers preached it—Plato, and Socrates, and Antigone, and Ornithorhyncus, and Cum Grano Salis, and all the rest of them—and they maintained that after death the soul of a man might possibly inhabit the body of an animal. Now that's something serious; that's very serious; that's more serious than imagining you can keek a cloy, or cloy a keek, or whatever it is; and for this reason, that what the mind dwells on often happens. That is well-known and recognised. Artaxerxes declares it in his School Board Dictionary. And if you were to give up your transmotion of souls and take to the established metempsychosis of the great and wise men of all the centuries, where would you land yourself? Supposing your spirit were to find itself in a moo-cow—what then?"

"A wad fecht ma way oot," said Maxwell, sturdily.

"That might be bad for the coo," said Miss Eelin, on reflection, and she turned to her rasps, while he went on with his barrow. She called him back. "Look here, Maxwell, people far more learned than you or I have given up these problems as hopeless; and I think you might too—instead of frightening the maidservants with them."

"Ay, it's Morag ye're thinking o', Miss Eelin, is't no that?" said Maxwell, gloomily. "And I wonder what in the world would frichten her, the Hielan bizzom!"

When Eelin had re-entered the house, her mother had just come down to breakfast, and it was the girl's delight to wait upon her, with little ministrations and caresses and kindly words.

"But, Eelin, your hands are deadly cold!" exclaimed the ever-apprehensive mother. "And you're all shivering—"

"I had my breakfast in the open air, Mummie, and what could be splendider—there's a corner I know that Maxwell hasn't stripped—and if you go inside the bushes, and look out, that's the way to get rasps—"

"But what is this mad adventure of the morning I have heard about?" was the next and natural question.

"Nothing mad!—a work of public utility," was the rejoinder. "Trying how to save people from shipwreck—what more practical and useful?"

"I wish you would go to bed all the same."

"Why, Lily Neile is in my bed," was the objection.

"Then you can go into mine. Or they could get the yellow room ready for you in three minutes—"

"Oh, Mummie, on such a swingeing day!" the daughter cried. "I wonder if I could find old Fergus: there's a Zulu trout-fly that I'm sure would do the trick in this clear weather—Mr. Watson tied them for me—I'll back them against anything—" And so she went on, in her gay audacity of youth; it was her mother who regarded her with some concern; she knew better what these occasional shiverings might portend.

None the less, when her mother had finished breakfast, Miss Eelin set off for the town; and no one, observing her gait, would have thought she had suffered anything from her dip in the Moray Firth. Nay, she

was reciting to herself, in a proud kind of way, the sad ending of Gilderoy—

> "Alas! that e'er such Laws were made,
> To hang a Man for Gear;
> Either for stealing Cow or Sheep,
> Or yet for Horse or Mare:
> Had not the Laws then been so strict,
> I had never lost my Joy;
> But now he lodges with auld *Nick*,
> That hang'd my *Gilderoy*."

And in Castle-street she was busy with her purchases; and here and there a pensioner had to be visited, to be cheered up a bit by bantering—and opening of windows; and then again at the corner of Bridge-street, she had the luck to run against Archie Gilchrist, who produced from his pocket the first batch of proofs of the volume about Tannahill and Hector Macneill. Now Miss Eelin, in her brief and erratic career as an authoress, had certainly seen proofs, but they were long strips of things from the *Observer* office; these were the first book-proofs she had seen, and she regarded them with such interest that she made no scruple about stepping into the shop of a jeweller hard by (he was a friend of hers) in order to examine them more minutely. It seemed all so different from what she had written. She feared it looked hard, and stupid, and cold; the public would not lend a measure of softening sympathy; and the publishers would lose, and might even convey reproach. And yet she turned over the pages with a vague delight; and here and there she marked felicities of phrase which she knew well enough were the interpolations of her coadjutor—slyly inserted, so as not to wound her pride. And she liked the big type, so different from that of the

newspaper-office. And she did not understand, as she went from sheet to sheet, that Archie Gilchrist had his eyes upon her, in a strangely wistful way, as if wondering what the future held for him and her. It was not of Tannahill and Hector Macneill he was thinking.

"Oh, look here, Archie," she said, startling him out of his reverie. "See what they have printed—'Yet sweeter and fairer and clear to this bosom'—'clear'—'clear!'—"

"Oh, never mind that," he answered her. "I'll go over the proofs carefully. Don't you trouble."

"But," said she, bravely, "if you are going to do all the work, it is your name that must appear on the title-page."

"You have done most of the writing, Eelin," said he.

"Well, let's make a compromise," said she. "It has always seemed to me rather shabby for small writers to try to win a reputation for themselves by clinging on to the coat-tails of the great writers—introductions, biographies, selections, new editions, and always with the small writer's name conspicuous on the title-page. Now suppose at the end of the preface you and I simply put our initials—'A. G.' 'E. M.'—wouldn't that be a little more modest?"

"I am glad to be associated with you in any way, Eelin," he answered; and more he could not say; for two customers had come into the shop, and it was but time for the young scribblers to go.

Then, all her business settled, in various directions, she hurried away home; and here was Lily Neile come downstairs, and as it was just about lunch-time, she was persuaded to stay; and thereafter they telephoned for a cab, and she was driven away quite happy and content, just as if she had never been in the Moray Firth that

morning. All the while Wild Eelin had been in a curiously unquiet mood, suggesting diverse projects, and darting from one subject to another.

"When Archie and I are married," she said to her mother, these two being now together in the drawing-room, "we must give up one day each week to the Nibelunglied—a new translation into English. I mean—to get it as near perfection as may be, though it may be far enough off. And this afternoon I must devote to Heine; I want to have another try at the 'Grenadiere'—and perhaps a little polishing at the 'Kevlaar'—though it is so horribly difficult—"

"My dearest Eelin," the mother entreated, "don't meddle with Heine to-day; you know it invariably makes you so nervous and excited; and you'll be lying awake all night thinking of words and turns of words. No, no; go away and find old Fergus, as you suggested, and get into his boat, and see if between you you can't bring us back a few sea-trout. That's better than Heine. Oh, by the way, speaking of Fergus, there's a letter from Mr. Somerled Macdonald——"

"But not for me, of course," said Eelin, hotly.

"Well, no; he certainly addressed it to me, but the news is general news——"

"If I offered to sever my head from my neck, he would not send me a line of writing!" she cried, with some exaggeration of bitterness.

"Much good it would do you then!" said the mother, laughing; she was trying to soothe down this highly-strung young person. "He only wanted to tell me that he has found a permanent situation for Angus, the water-bailiff; and there's a good wage, and a fairly com-

fortable cottage, and as much peat as ever he likes to cut. Then his daughter is coming from Ben Vora to keep house for him; all very satisfactory. But why should he send such details to me? Why not to you? Well, then, my dear infant, I'll tell you. You frightened him. He thought you were too proud to be spoken to——"

"And I am," she said, vehemently. "I am too proud to be spoken to—by some persons. But that's nothing. That's nothing. The pilgrimage to Kevlaar is more to the purpose—if one could get anywhere near to the simplicity and feeling of it——"

"Oh, no, Eelin, darling," the mother pleaded, "keep away from Heine, for this afternoon, at least! You tell me what lines you are thinking of, and I will make a literal translation for you, and then you can versify and beautify later on."

"Oh, but, Mummie, I have just been versifying!—and you'll never guess what! I have been trying to find some English words for 'The Braes of Glenbraon.' They're dreadfully bad, I know; for one thing the measure is so unusual; but then as they will never leave the strict seclusion of these premises, it does not much matter. Oh, I daresay if Archie Gilchrist were to see them, he would want to publish them; for all my geese are swans to him; but I cannot let him injure his own property in the newspaper; indeed, I have been thinking of putting an end to the 'White Cockade' contributions altogether, they are too frivolous and impertinent——"

"They are the brightest things in the paper!" said Mrs. Macdonald, warmly—of course, she was a quite impartial judge.

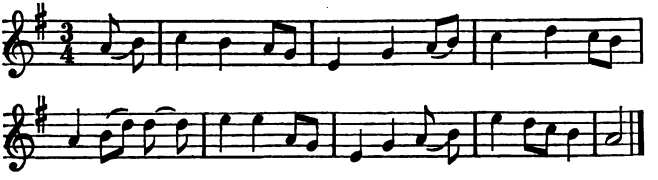
"But about the 'Braes of Glenbraon'——"

"Some other day—some other day, Eelin, dear," the mother implored, with an instinctive dread.

"Do you prefer the West Ross-shire version of the melody, or the Argyleshire?" the girl went on, and she crossed to the open piano, unobservant of her mother's anxiety.

"Some other day, Eelin, dear, some other day!"

For of all the wild sad airs that float about the Western Highlands that of the Bruthaichean Ghlinn Braoin is the most penetratingly wild and sad—when it is properly played; and Eelin Macdonald had enough of the Celtic sensitiveness to understand; there was no staccato hop, skip, and jump in her music, even when, as now, she dabbed out the notes with one finger. This was the West Ross-shire version:

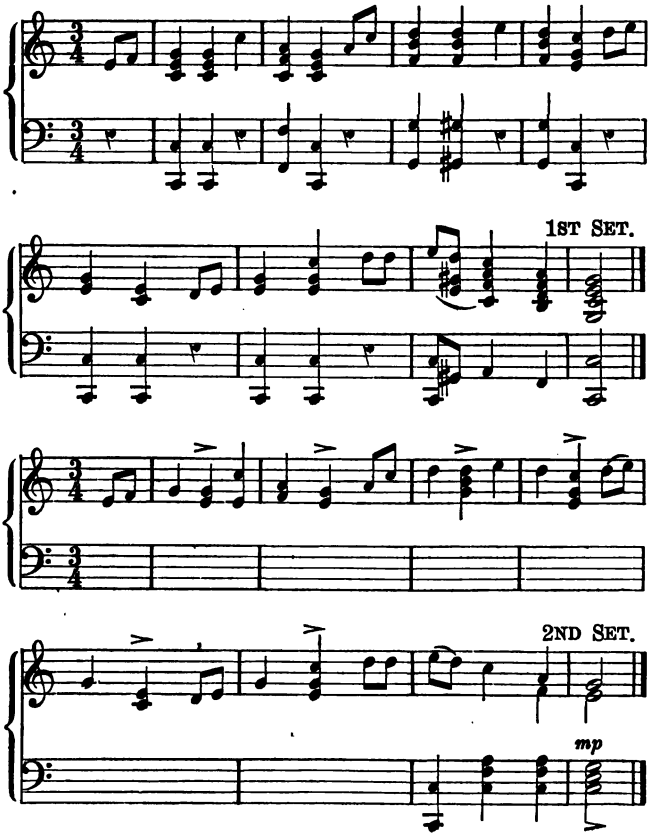


As so given there was surely nothing to rend the heart; it was only an indication of what might be made of the air by harmonising; and so far the apprehensive Bean-an-Tighearn was consoled. But it was different when Eelin sat down to the piano, and said—

"I think the Argyleshire version is the more pathetic of the two; and I am going to let you hear some of the lines I have written—in strict confidence, you know, Mummie—in confidence——"

And then in a low voice, so as to be almost unheard,

and slowly, and with an exquisite expression of tenderness, she sang the Argyleshire "Braes of Glenbraon"——



and these are some of the idle words she had written—

All lonely I ponder,
For far away yonder
It's there we would wander:
O the Braes of Glenbraon!

In the warm sunny weather,
On the slopes of red heather,
We lay there together:
O the Braes of Glenbraon!

—but long before she had finished the first verse, the poor mother had burst out crying—silently—to herself—behind the shelter of a book: and then, to conceal her sobbing, she went quickly to the nearest window, and pretended to be occupied in watching the movements of old Maxwell, who was weeding some flower-plot. Unfortunately Eelin chanced to follow, and in great consternation, as she linked her arm within her mother's arm, saw that tears were running down her cheeks.

"Why, mother," she exclaimed, "what has happened?"

"It seems to me," she answered, in trembling tones, "that the man or woman who thought of that air must have died in heart-broken misery; and it is not fit for a young girl, just entering upon her life, to have such unhappiness in her mind."

"Mother, dear, a silly old song to put you about like that! And it isn't misery: it's only the recollection of former joy. Well, I will never sing 'The Braes of Glenbraon' again, if that will please you." And then she continued, in an absent kind of way: "I do not even know where they are, those Braes of Glenbraon. There

never have been any Braes of Glenbraon for me; and there never will be." And then again she added, with a courageous blitheness: "But I'm no minding!"

She was unsettled and fidgety as she went about the room; and at length she was forced to go and lie down on the couch, because her head was so bad. But she made a gallant fight for it, lest her mother should be further alarmed.

"Mummie," she said, with a forced kind of laugh, "shall I tell you what you are thinking of? You are thinking of sending for Doctor McIlvaine, simply because of these ridiculous shiverings. Now listen, and I will explain, and you will save the doctor's fee. My dear mother, you don't understand small boys. But I do. I'm awfully fond of them; and I know their ways and their tricks. You're too haughty, that's what's the matter with you; they wouldn't have you for a chum. They don't mind me—though I was in disfavour for awhile, because I slapped the cheeks of the biggest of them, when he was thrashing the small goal-keeper."

She put her hand to her forehead in a wearied sort of way, and her mother was quick to bring pungent lavender-water.

"Now, lie still, Eelin dear, and you'll tell me about the small boys later on!"

"But I want to explain, Mummie, darling," she said, rather fretfully, "so that you need not concern yourself about these abominable shivers. And this is it. When the small boys are off on an expedition to bathe, each one of them before leaving home manages to snick a piece of bread, or a corner of cheese, or a biscuit; and that they carefully hide in their pocket and preserve.

For why? That is their 'chittering-bit.' And as soon as they have come out of the water, each one of them puts his 'chittering-bit' into his mouth and munches it, and that stops the shivers and shakes. Oh, it is well-known!—not to you, of course—not to the haughty lady of Glengarva House: but the young rascals rather chum with me, and I have learnt something of their games. And then, you see, Mummie, neither Lily Neile nor I had a 'chittering-bit' this morning; we did not think of it; and that's the origin of the shivers and shakes, and they are not of the least importance. But my head—my head—I think somebody must have poured quick-silver into it—for it goes this way and that—and yet it is so heavy——"

"Eelin," said the mother, with an unusual assumption of authority, "I insist on your going to bed this very minute—" and she caught the girl's arm, and assisted her to rise, and took her upstairs. When she had seen her comfortably bestowed, and the pillow arranged for the pained head, then the Bean-an-Tighearn went instantly downstairs—and of course at once sent for the doctor.

In due course Dr. McIlvaine arrived—a tall, thin, grave personage, with an extreme alertness of eye which he generally managed to conceal. Before going to see his patient, he was told of the morning's escapade. He did not say anything. He and Mrs. Macdonald proceeded to the room.

When they returned, he said slowly—

"Well, I don't see any immediate cause for alarm. No doubt there is a certain amount of fever, that might

be caused by a sudden shock to the system—jumping over the side of a boat, for example—"

"But, doctor," the distressed mother said, "Eelin is as used to the water as a Newfoundland dog! And she can dive like a seal—and swim like a duck: surely that could not have been the cause? And as for the few minutes' drive home, without changing, certainly that was a great imprudence—still, for one of Eelin's constitution and out-of-door habits—"

The doctor sate silent for a second or two, thrumming the tips of his fingers. Then he suddenly looked up, with one of his swift, veiled, inquiring glances.

"Mrs. Macdonald, pardon my asking: but has your daughter been undergoing any severe mental distress of late?"

"N—no—not that I know of," said the gentle-spoken widow—and yet she blushed guiltily. "Of course, girls have their secrets; and one may surmise; yes, and one may be quite wrong. One cannot hurt a girl's feelings by being too intrusive; even if you were on the right track you would only the more surely wound her. There are some sacred things. She has her rights and dignities. She ought to be allowed the refuge of silence, even from her mother."

"Yes, yes," said the doctor, "all that you say is prompted by excellent reason and sympathy. But of course I have to regard the case from a professional point of view, and I want to understand a little more, if possible. Now pardon me if again I ask a rude question: isn't your daughter engaged to be married to Mr. Gilchrist of the *Observer?* I would not mention such a thing, only that I heard her confidential friends, the

Neiles, talking about it openly, as if there were no secret whatever—"

"Nor is there—not the slightest!" the mother answered him, openly.

"Has the engagement been broken off?" he asked again, with a quick, bird-like look of interrogation.

"Oh, no, oh, no!" she assured him. "Nor is there a thought of such a thing on either side: that I am certain of."

The doctor took up his hat and rose from his chair.

"I will look in to-morrow morning," he said, "to see how things are going: I hope well. I trust well."

She followed him through the hall: the door was wide open: the pleasant autumn scent came in from the garden. On the top of the steps he turned.

"You don't know of any recent and sudden agitation—apart from this life-saving adventure?" he asked of her.

"Only this," answered the mother, bursting into tears and hiding her face, "that in the afternoon—she was—she was singing 'The Braes of Glenbraon'; and if you had heard her you would have said it was the cry of a broken heart."

CHAPTER XXII.

LABYRINTHS.

NEXT morning there was a pale, cold, clammy fog hanging about, especially over the woods: the eye was glad to seek for relief in the orange glow of the half-sodden marigolds in the garden-plots, or even in the wind-drift of copper-coloured leaves, through which peeped here and there the strong clear green of the

none-so-pretty. Dr. McIlvaine, as he walked out along the banks of the river, was considering certain things that had lain in his mind from the previous day. A dip in the Moray Firth was not likely to have caused such a complete nervous breakdown. No, nor even the imprudent drive home. Nor yet the singing of a Gaelic air. No; but where there was mischief lying latent in the system—and mischief of some standing, ready to declare itself at any moment—might not the singing of the Gaelic air have been, so to speak, the pulling of the trigger?

When he arrived at the house and had visited his patient, he appeared to have little new to report, beyond a certain rise of temperature; only, he recommended that a day-nurse should be engaged, besides the night-nurse he had already sent out, so as to give some relief to the trembling mother. As for the girl upstairs in her room, she did not seem to care. She wished to be left alone. She lay with her hand to her forehead, moaning a little now and again when she fancied no one was near. Wild Eelin was no longer wild, or audacious, or braggart; she was in complete collapse; the moanings were like the moanings of some despairing soul, anxious only to get away from its mortal tenement.

But on the afternoon of the following day something different occurred.

"Nurse," she called, in her husky voice, and she tried to raise herself somewhat, and in the wave-blue eyes burned "the light that never was on sea or land" —"who is that little boy on the window-sill?"

"Oh, one of the usual ones," said the practised nurse, and she propped up the pillow.

"But he is all white, and he has got wings, and he is carrying a case of golf-clubs under his arms!"

"Oh, yes, most of them are like that," said the nurse. "Don't you bother about him, Miss Eelin. He'll be flying off to Nairn directly. He'll be off to the links with the rest of them. So just you lie quiet, and never mind him. Shut your eyes, Miss Eelin, and I'm sure you'll never see him again."

Well, she obediently did shut her eyes, but she continued to talk, in a rambling, incoherent fashion, with short, panting breaths between the sentences:

"I should not have slapped his cheeks, even if he was hitting the small boy. It was unladylike. My mother would not have done that. But then—but then—I've always gone blundering, and doing wrong. Always doing wrong—always—always. And I should not mind so much about the other people, if only I could make some atonement to my mother, who has been so patient and forgiving. If only she would give me absolution for everything that's gone by—then—then I could slip off—and be in nobody's way. Lily," she said, mistaking the nurse for Lily Neile—"do you know what my mother renounced for my sake? Why, we might have been back in Kinvaig—Lord Mountmahon could have managed it—and he was willing—the old Macdonalds of Kinvaig—back in Glengarva—oh, and just imagine what a horrible beast I am—I did think of it, for a moment—yes, I did—I told you a lie, Lily—for I asked myself what was the sacrifice of an insignificant person like me compared with the keeping of the historical associations. Oh, and then the sweet mother stepped in and refused; and when I knew I was not to marry that

fearful creature that goes about with his bullies, I think I went a little bit off my head with the frantic joy of it. You see, I did not know whether to laugh or cry, and I went up the Castle hill, and all the world was ringed with gold—gold—gold—gold along the Black Isle—and along the Beauly Firth—and away up by Ben Wyvis; and I wished well to everyone living in the world—indeed, indeed I did!—my heart was so happy, and grateful, and thankful—"

The nurse tried to soothe her down, and she rested for awhile; when she resumed, she was talking to herself, in these inaudible gasps.

"I know that—that I married Archie Gilchrist out of ambition; and I suppose that was wrong too—always wrong—always wrong; but I thought—I thought I could cheer him up a bit on the way—and he is going far. He is going far—he has the large outlook. Lily, dear, are you listening?"

"Oh, yes, Miss Eelin," said the nurse, bending over her and putting a cool hand on the hot forehead, "but I wouldn't trouble any more at present. It's all arranged and quite satisfactory. I shouldn't wonder if you got some sleep now!"

"Ah, but listen—listen—about Archie Gilchrist—it's all very well to hear a farm-lass singing one of your songs—but—but he has the wider outlook. And it isn't merely fame either—no, no—not merely to have people talk about you; but—but—but if you have the consciousness that you have done your best for your day and generation—however little—however little—and if you know that all over the world—in Melbourne—and Ceylon—and San Francisco—and—ah, but I cannot re-

member the other places—my head being so bad—but if you know that all over the world there were people who regarded you in a kindly way—perhaps even with affection—because of your writings—who were grateful to you for having done your best for your own times—isn't—isn't that something worth living and striving and dying for? And Archie will win to that—oh, yes, I am certain—and if I can cheer him up a bit—what else is left for me—what better could I do? Oh, it is a splendid thing to make a name for yourself that is regarded with affection all over the world; and even that single piece of Archie's that has been quoted everywhere—but I cannot remember what he called it—my head being so painful—well, I beg your pardon—I beg your pardon——." And with that she turned wearily away, and hid her face in the pillow.

Her murmurings were not always so intelligible; sometimes they consisted of the mere repetition of a word—the brain trying and failing to find expression; and always as the head fell back, there was the plaintive apology—"Well, I cannot remember—and I beg your pardon—I beg your pardon!" And sometimes she thought she was talking to Lily Neile, and sometimes to her mother, and sometimes to the nurse; but always when they could gather the meaning of these darkened phrases, there was this expression of sorrow—this desire to make reparation—this appeal for forgiveness to all whom she had injured. The mother took these piteous pleadings as if they were real, and wept bitterly; the nurse was a more judicious attendant. And so the time went on, and the fever ran its course, and not a footfall was heard on any staircase or on any corridor

—for Wild Eelin, though she was too ready with her quips and sarcasms, was yet pretty well liked by the people in this house. Morag, the heavy lass from Mull, was as noiseless as any of them; she stole about on tip-toe, in her stocking-soles.

Next morning the wandering brain was off on another tack; and the poor mother, whose agonised listening put far too much importance on these vague utterances, could not make out what all this meant concerning lonely hills, and martyrs' graves, and the calling of curlews and plovers. Glenmuir, too—where was Glenmuir? —what could Eelin know about Glenmuir? And Airdsmoss—and the Covenanters? For the truth is, Eelin of the eyes like the sea-wave had never evinced much interest in the Covenanters, except as a historical phenomenon; she knew next to nothing of the South of Scotland; she was a great deal more familiar with the Conca d'oro than with the Canongate; she could have shown a stranger the treasures of Boulak, but Paisley—to her regret, no doubt—she had never beheld; if she had addressed an Edinburgh porter or cab-driver, he would most certainly have taken her for an Englishwoman. And why, therefore, this rambling talk about Wardlaw and Cairntable—and the standard of Zion—and the pesewepes crying about the lonely graves? Well, it was by the merest accident that the mother obtained the key to this enigma. She was out in the garden, waiting and watching for the doctor; and in her helpless anxiety, she kept wandering to and fro; and so by chance she passed the now disused summer-house. There was a volume lying on the table, face downward; the careless Eelin had no doubt left it there; and so the mother

took it up to see what she had been reading; and here, at once, was the solution of the mystery. It was Hislop's "Cameronian's Dream" that the girl had been looking at, and that had left a last impress on an excited brain.

> "In a dream of the night I was wafted away
> To the muirland of mist where the martyrs lay;
> Where Cameron's sword and his Bible are seen
> Engraved on the stone where the heather grows green.
>
> . . . .
>
> And in Glenmuir's wild solitude, lengthened and deep,
> Were the whistling of plovers and bleating of sheep."

And then the mother went quickly indoors and stole up to the sick chamber. There was still some muttered talk about the pesewepes crying and the lonely graves —and soon a quiet palm was put on the burning forehead, and a smooth voice was speaking:

"Yes, yes, Eelin, darling, what you say is quite true; but it happened a long time ago; and you must not mind. You're quite right, you know; I daresay the plovers are calling there over the tombstones; but that doesn't concern you, does it?—for all you've got to do is to lie still and sleep a little and get well."

"Yes, yes"—they heard the whispered answer, as they tried to follow her through the dim labyrinths. "That was you, Mummie, with the silken voice. Well, I beg your pardon—I beg your pardon. I have always been doing wrong. I know it. I am sorry. I beg your pardon—oh, yes, yes—I ask your pardon—I ask for your pardon——"

The mother was a bad attendant; the nurse had to persuade her to go away; she could sit in the adjoining

dressing-room if she wished—and "cry her fill." For sometimes Miss Eelin was not so much of an invalid—only that she spoke with difficulty, and had a tendency to hold her hand over her chest, as if there were a deep-seated pain there. Nay, she talked quite cheerfully at times, in that hushed, troubled way.

"Nurse," she said, "are you a good swimmer? I—I used to be—before my head got bad, you know. And I wish you would bring out my swimming things—they're in the cupboard there—the top drawer—and the felt slippers—they're at the bottom. I only want to look at them—and to remember. Because, you understand, don't you, Lily Neile and the rest of them challenged me—challenged me to swim from the Devil's Kirn to the foot of the weir—and—and I failed; oh, yes, I failed; I was crying when I came on to the shingle again—though they did not see it. But some day—I will—I will—"

"Oh, yes, of course, Miss Eelin," said the nurse, in her quiet tones. "I've heard of your swimming—there's none of them can swim like you—"

"No, no, I don't say that, Lily," she answered, moaning. "I've always failed. How many yards can you throw?—and I can only manage twenty-five—clean—twenty-five, clean—and Archie Gilchrist says it is a good enough line for the Nish—from a boat—but he always—he always apologises for me—"

Then for awhile she was silent; but of a sudden she flung herself up, and with the dark blue eyes staring wildly, she sang aloud and clear—

All lonely I ponder,
For far away yonder,
It's there we would wander:
O the Braes of Glenbraon!

The miraculous effort was beyond her strength; she fell back; the husky voice resumed its sway; and what the nurse could now make out was something about "Oh, my head is not so well—and I beg pardon—I ask for pardon—and I have always told Lily she could throw a better line than I could—oh, yes, of course—of course! And I beg your pardon—I am so sorry for the trouble. I wish to thank you—I—I wish to thank you—oh, yes, indeed—but my head is not well—I ask for your pardon—"

Not once, during all these delirious ramblings, did she mention the name of Somerled Macdonald; nay, in some inscrutable way, she managed to avoid it; for she was conscious of the presence of the two men up at Alt-na-Traive; but it was only of the elder Macdonald she would speak.

"A blue and silver phantom is the best for trolling," she said—or tried to say—"and a small size—especially now—when the salmon in the loch are worth nothing—but there may be a good basket of sea-trout, and that is what I would wish for Mr. Macdonald. The poor blind man; my heart is heavy when I think of him; and yet he has done what he could for his kinsfolk and his name; he must know that; that must comfort him; and the thanks of all the people he has helped. I—I used to sit with him in the verandah—of the hotel—in the sunlight—and—and I could give him some idea of what was happening below—when Fergus was lashing the

water—and the lads looking on. Oh, I tell you the bank—the bank is very steep—near to the suspension-bridge—and—and if you have no boat, then there's nothing but the Spey cast—are you listening to me, Lil, darling?"

"Oh, yes," said the nurse, gently.

"Ay, you do it well—you do it well—even Fergus not much better—but it is better to have the boat. Are you there, nurse?"

"Oh, yes, indeed, Miss Eelin," was the ready answer.

"Well, if it is not too much trouble—and I ask your pardon—will you get out my swimming things and the felt slippers, and put them at the foot of the bed? Oh, but I must conquer the Devil's Kirn yet—when I get a little better. You see, it's the only thing I can do, in a kind of way. Lily Neile throws a far better line: and Archie Gilchrist—oh, well, he's not to be compared with any of them, for he is a man of genius, and I know what lies ahead for him. Oh, thank-you, nurse, I like to look at my swimming things—and—and when I ask you to fetch me 'The Braes of Glenbraon'—from the music on the piano in the drawing-room—mind you go and hunt it up. You will find it somewhere—somewhere—and don't come back till you have it in your hands. 'The Braes of Glenbraon'—remember."

And then she relapsed into silence. But with the abnormal astuteness of a distraught brain she had laid her plans only too well.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE FATES.

MOUNTMAHON and his gang of bullet-heads had fled away to the south: what did Archie Gilchrist care? He asked his lawyers to abandon the proceedings that had been begun: why should he care? There came to him the proofs of a small volume of his verses that an Edinburgh publisher had undertaken to issue: he could not read a line of them. The visionary towers of Westminster Abbey had disappeared from the horizon: they did not concern him. His very existence seemed to be bound up within the walls of Glengarva House; and yet he was no obtrusive visitor; rather he held himself aloof; he would noiselessly sneak along the gravel path, and look for somebody who could give him news; and then, if there was nobody, he never thought of ringing the bell; he would as noiselessly retire, and go away round by the small suspension-bridges to the Islands, from whence he could keep watch on the red house and its green Venetian blinds. With a dog-like fidelity of affection he would remain there, no one tossing him a crumb of comfort. Occasionally, it is true, he would bethink him of his duties; and generally he had a bundle of papers and manuscripts in his pocket; and these he would mechanically attempt to examine. Here, for example, was an article on "Statesmen who have proclaimed themselves failures"; and it was written, in an elaborately pungent style, by a member of the Assassins' Club; but when he came to read of this distinguished politician who had ruined a great reputation by his insensate aim at dismembering the empire, or of that less

distinguished politician who had attempted to govern England by uttering a series of little jests, his brain refused to follow. The murmur of the wide, silver-glancing stream spoke to him of something quite different. Over yonder, behind the terraced trees, was the house that claimed his eyes. And well he knew this: that all his trumpery ambitions and desires—yes, and his life too—he would willingly and gladly surrender if only for one brief moment he could see Eelin Macdonald, in her resolute frankness of youth and health, come swinging along by the laurel bushes and out by the open gate, and chanting to herself, as she was most likely to do, something about

> "Is your war-pipe asleep, MacCrimmon?
> Is your war-pipe asleep, and for ever, MacCrimmon?
> Shall the pibroch that welcomed the foe to Ben-aer,
> Be hushed when we seek the dark wolf in his lair,
> To give back our wrongs to the giver?"

That was more the Wild Eelin of former days. The fact is, the latest reports had not been quite as favourable; and his heart was like bursting within him.

One morning his river-side solitude was broken in upon by two visitors; and the current being high, and the wind from the south, the noise of the weir was such that they had approached him before he was aware. They were the night-nurse, Mary Kendrick, out for her accustomed stroll, and Janet Forsyth, who had some idea of taking up the same profession, and was anxious to know how she should set about qualifying. The paths through the Islands wind a good deal; and it is probable that the two girls, so far from having any intention of intruding, would much have preferred to follow their

own way along the bank, but the moment he saw them he jumped to his feet, and, addressing the night-nurse, said—

"Well?"

It was all he could utter. He was trembling a little, and his face had got rather white—for these solitary musings and gazings do not strengthen the nerves.

The prim, pretty little nurse, in all the morning freshness of her costume, looked startled, and rather drew back.

"About Miss Macdonald?" she said, timidly.

"Yes, yes!"

"But you understand, Mr. Gilchrist," said she—for she knew him slightly as a friend of Janie Forsyth's—"we are not allowed to make any report except to the doctor. It is the doctor you must ask—or someone in the house. It would hardly do for a nurse to come out of a sick-room, and begin talking about the case—now, would it?"

"Oh, my God," he cried. "Is she worse?" And the agony of his appeal went straight to the heart of Janie Forsyth.

"Mary Kendrick," said she, "my mother and your mother were cousins, and I know what they would think of such a refusal, coming from anyone of their kith and kin. Oh, well I know. They would say it was unwomanly. Yes, they would. They would say that. For you are aware of the relationship between Miss Macdonald and Mr. Gilchrist; and surely he is the very first one to be told, whatever is the true state of affairs. And what were you saying to me not five minutes ago, when we were crossing the bridge?"

The fresh-complexioned little nurse blushed consciously, but still she clung to her professional attitude.

"If you were to call over at the house," she suggested.

"I cannot keep plaguing them at the house," said he. "Surely they have enough trouble there."

She hesitated for another second or so, and then she said,

"Well, would you care to have my opinion, for what it is worth? And you won't tell the doctor I said anything about the case. Because it isn't right, you know —it isn't right: my opinion may be worth nothing."

"But what do you think—what do you think, Miss Kendrick—you yourself—you personally?" he urged upon her.

"If it comes to that," she answered him a little more boldly, "I should say she was getting along excellently well."

He could have fallen on his knees and worshipped her; for the mind of this young man was not well-ordered during these days.

And then the prim little nurse, finding that the heavens had not fallen upon her for her indiscretion, became a little more confidential; and Gilchrist besought the two girls to take a seat on the bench beside him; he did not wish to lose a single word through the rushing noise of the weir.

"Oh, she speaks often of you," continued the demure young person, stumbling headlong into further revelations: perhaps she had a natural sympathy for young lovers: perhaps she had been stung by Janet Forsyth's reproach. "That is, when we can make out what she

is saying. And she thinks that you and she are married; and that you are to go away to London and be a great man; and she is to look on and admire. She has said that again and again; and I have been able to understand so far; but generally her talk is about bits of old songs—though her memory does not carry her further than a line or two—because of course we don't encourage her—we try to pacify her. Oh, there's another thing—there's a poetry-book coming out, she says, and she wants to know if you are going to dedicate it to her—"

"I have the proofs in my pocket!" he exclaimed. "But I never thought of any dedication to her; it would be too much presumption; I was waiting to put her name on something better—"

"I have told her you would dedicate the book to her," said the little nurse, placidly, "and she seemed pleased. So, if you should see her, you must be prepared—"

"Oh, do you think I could see her—for but a moment!—for a moment!" he entreated.

But again the nurse drew back in alarm.

"Oh, that is not for me to say. That would be for the doctor—or her mother, perhaps. I wouldn't advise it myself. She would most likely take you for someone else—some stranger, perhaps—and that would aggravate the fever. I mean, I myself think so; and my opinion is of no value; you might ask the doctor—"

"But couldn't I even look at her for one second?" he pleaded. "I would stand behind a screen—I only want to hear the sound of her voice—"

"You couldn't make out anything, unless you were

accustomed," said the nurse. "Bits of old songs, for the most part; only, when she comes to the 'Braes of Glenbraon'—do you know that one?"

"Do I know the 'Bruthaichean Ghlinn Braoin?'" said he—for both of them were of Highland birth and breeding.

"Ay, that's the terrible time we have, for she breaks into a despair of sobbing, and it is so difficult to stop. I fear the 'Braes of Glenbraon' more than anything; and I don't understand why it should affect her so. But when she talks about you, she is more contented. She has great hopes; and there's some big cathedral or abbey in London where you are to have a tablet or a monument or something of that kind, and she is to come and place flowers. Mr. Gilchrist, don't heed what I am saying; these wanderings don't mean much; and I have no right to tell you—only Janie Forsyth seemed to think I might——"

"But more—more," he begged, with hungry ears.

"There is little more," she said, "that can rightly be made out. She seems to wish to ask the pardon of everyone she has injured—as if she ever could willingly have injured anybody! And mostly her talk is about you—and books—and fame—and London—and the great figure you are to become there, amongst the literary people. Oh, yes, that's all right; that's quite cheerful in a way. But I do not like it when she begins about the Braes of Glenbraon; I do not like her bursting into sobs; for there is something behind that I can't make out, and she refuses to be comforted. No, nor does her mother understand. There is something dark and hidden. But then again that often happens in fever—and without any

real reason; so I trust, Mr. Gilchrist, you will put no value on my words—only, you seemed distressed about not hearing the news—and you will forget what I have been telling you—and think we were merely having a claverclash on an idle morning."

"I am grateful to you," he said—he could say no more.

And then the two girls rose, and he did not seek to detain them: no doubt they were returning to the house. When they had left he set off for the town. In a lane near the corner of Union-street a poor woman was singing "Thou bonnie wood o' Craigielea." It is not one of Tannahill's best; and the woman could sing no more than a tin cow; but then—there were associations; he hastily fumbled in his pockets, and found a shilling, and that he gave her, and hurried on—lest she should see his filled eyes. He was all undone.

He walked about until he could pull himself together a bit, and then he entered the office, and went straight to the composing room.

"Mr. Forbes," said he to the head compositor, "which of your lads do you take to be the best Gaelic scholar?"

"It's Duncan Munro there," was the instant answer. "There's no doubt about that. He has taken prizes at the Argyllshire *Môd*, and Lord Archibald himself made him a compliment."

The Editor went over to this lad, Munro, who was rather a pallid youth, with leadened fingers and stained apron.

"Look here, Munro," said he, "I want you to do me a favour. Will you write out for me a literal trans-

lation—an absolutely literal translation—of the 'Braes of Glenbraon'—the *Bruthaichean Ghlinn Braoin*, you know——"

"Oh, yes, I will, sir," replied the young man, quickly: he was extremely flattered.

"You understand," said the Editor, "that it is not for publication—neither in this nor in any other paper; it is a kindness to me personally; I want to know what each phrase means, word by word; you see, the Gaelic that I have is not good enough for that. And don't attempt any rhyme, as if it were to be printed; only the literal meaning of every line: search for the real meaning; and don't try to make poetry: do you understand?"

"Perfectly, sir, perfectly," said the pallid-faced youth —who was proud to be thus singled out.

"I shall be obliged to you—I shall be greatly obliged to you," said the Editor, and therewith he went off to his own room, and sank heavily into his chair. He did not know what all this about the "Braes of Glenbraon" might signify. And he could not quite trust Nurse Kendrick's report; after all, it was mere gossip, uttered under a pledge of confidence; perhaps kindness prompted it, and made it too favourable. And sometimes, in a wild sort of way, he wondered whether after all his old mother up there in the north might never see the gracious and glorious creature who had promised to be his wife. The poor old widow up at Dingwall was passionately and wistfully ambitious where her son was concerned; and proud she was of the mention of his name even in the obscurest of papers; she treasured up small cuttings and paragraphs sent her by friends and acquaint-

ances. To him these things were sufficiently trivial. But if she were never to understand the crowning honour of his life?—if she were never to behold Eelin Macdonald in her radiant young beauty, and genius, and sarcasm, and laughter? Well, he always had borne with him a secret and inscrutable dread. His splendid fortune had carried him too far and high. Only—only—if he could have one more look at Wild Eelin—at Eelin of the eyes like the sea-wave—restored to her ordinary gay exuberance of health—coming along by the Cathedral with her audacious freedom of step—crossing the Suspension-bridge with now a glance at the Castle hill and now at the seagulls hovering over the shallows at the Friar's Shot—appearing in Union-street, the tradesmen's books in her hand—nodding to this friend or to that one, and smiling with the wonderful smile that gladdened people—if only he could have a single look at her like this, it mattered little what became of him. Nay, the prayer in his heart was that the "*belle dame sans merci*" should yet again go "singing on her way"—conscious or unconscious of the destruction she was causing. He would willingly step aside, if she wished to be free. But Eelin of the wave-blue eyes, grown proud and high-spirited again, rejoicing in the gaiety of her maidenhood, hail-fellow-well-met with gentle and simple—with the bare-legged boys of the river-side—with the grave members of the Town Council—with the courteous station-master: that was the dream before him. Despite Nurse Kendrick's comforting assurances, he had heard other reports, from perhaps as authentic a source. And still he held in his hand the papers from a member of the Assassins' Club; and still he could not formulate any answer to the

sycophantic hireling; and still he could see nothing but the vision of a young girl, slim and erect of figure, and bold of step, crossing the Suspension-bridge and going along to Church-street and smiling to this one and that with her all-conquering eyes. He had no thought of intercepting her—no thought of obtruding himself upon her. If she were well, then for him the world was well. A distant glimpse of her was what he would crave for, and no more—and sometimes perchance she might have a kindly recollection of him.

A rap at the door aroused him from his longing reverie.

"Come in!" he called.

It was Tom Grieve, the sub-editor, who still and naturally maintained in a measure the familiar relations that had existed when Gilchrist was his junior.

"This is a rum start, it is indeed," said he looking at the sheets in his hand—they had been forwarded by a News Agency. "There can't be two Lord Mountmahons, I suppose?"

"It is to be hoped not," said Gilchrist.

"Well, then, the one you knew, the one who was down at Glengarva—who was hanging about the town at the time of the Northern Meeting—and was supposed to have an eye on Miss Macdonald of Kinvaig—yes, and who had you thrown into the river, as I imagine—well, he appears to have been overtaken—"

"By drink, of course," said Gilchrist.

"That is not the story, though I fancy drink may have been the origin of the affair," said the sub-editor, looking again at the loose sheets. "It's most extraordinary. The whole gang of them in a quiet and

peaceable and respectable hotel in Dieppe; and then at midnight they begin to raise Cain; arrears of pay, or else they'll haul his lordship out of bed and trundle him into the harbour. Then a general scrimmage; Mountmahon appears to have come onto the landing outside his bedroom; and one of the sloggers hits him a clip on the back of the neck, and down he goes headlong to the foot of the stairs. Poor devil. Stone dead. He might have died in better company—that's all I'm going to say. Poor wretch—poor wretch. It's different with a young fellow who leads his men up a difficult border pass, and gets a bullet through his brain: he has died nobly, and his country remembers him; but to break your neck in an ignominious drunken brawl, amongst a lot of bullies—"

"Grieve," said the Editor, "will you make it smooth? He was known to the ladies at Glengarva House—and they, or one of them, might read the report. Make it gentle. Hush it up as much as you can."

"I'll strike it out altogether if you like," said the sub-editor—though reluctantly; for this was a great piece of news for the country-side, and of course there were competing prints.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE DEVIL'S KIRN.

EARLY next morning there was enacted the strangest scene ever beheld on the banks of the river Nish. Almost before daybreak Archie Gilchrist was out at his accustomed post, apparently busy enough with books and magazines and manuscripts, and yet ever with a furtive

glance towards the red house across the wide stream. The dawn was graciously still and opalescent; the overclouded skies were of a banded silver-grey; the current, noiseless, stealing by, mirrored the foliage of the now yellowing trees; the smoke of the town, when that began to appear, rose vertically into the quiescent air and diffused itself into a pale blue film that softened all the wooded heights beyond. Peace reigned throughout the world; and in that house away over yonder why not also a beneficent and merciful peace?

Meanwhile this is what was happening in the sick-room.

"Nurse," Eelin called, in rather a frail voice, "will you do me a kindness? Will you go down—go down to the drawing-room—and search amongst the music—on the piano—and you'll find a scrawled piece—scrawled and scribbled over—but the title of it is 'The Braes of Glenbraon'——"

"Oh, if you will please to excuse me, Miss Eelin," the nurse said, anxiously. "Your mamma said I was not to bring you that song—because it upsets you so——"

"Oh, well," she said, with apparent indifference (but the eyes like the blue of the sea-wave were beginning to burn), "anything will do. I only want to look at the titles. My—my singing days are over. Why should I want to sing? It is happy people who sing. But the titles to look at: could you find for me 'Eelin of Kirkconnel'—'I wish I were where Eelin lies, on fair Kirkconnel lea'—Eelin, mind, not Helen—you'll find the correct version in Maver—or in Moffat——"

"Oh, yes, Miss," said the prim and placid Nurse

Kendrick. "As soon as ever the day-nurse is here, or when some of the servants are about, I will run down and fetch the music for you——"

"And why not now?" the girl pleaded. "It—it is a small favour to ask: only a minute——"

The nurse hesitated—and was lost.

"What did you say was the song, Miss?"

"'I wish I were where Eelin lies, for night and day on me she cries'—I—I don't remember the rest—for my head is not very well—only—only I wanted to look at the titles—if I am never to be able to sing any more—"

"What did you say were the books, Miss Eelin?"

"Oh, I have forgotten—I have forgotten," the girl moaned. "And—it is too much trouble—I ask your pardon—"

The prim little nurse was also impressionable in a way; she could not resist the wearied appeal; she said she would try to find "Eelin of Kirkconnel," and should be back in an instant. It was a kindly concession, wrung from her by the pathetic tones of the girl's voice; but it was not very wise; and it had consequences.

For the moment she had gone, Wild Eelin—with the cunning and the unnatural strength of delirium—sprang from the bed, undressed herself, put on her swimming-things, not even excepting the felt slippers to protect her feet; then she crept stealthily down the staircase, and passed along the hall, and unlocked the door, and went out. Her footstep on the gravelled path was silent; phantom-like she crossed the breadth of grass; and so she came to the river—at least, to the shingle bordering the stream.

And this was the apparition that Archie Gilchrist, on the other side, beheld, when he chanced to look up from his books. He did not pay much heed. Somehow his eyes had become dazed of late, what with long watching, and mechanical reading, and sleepless nights; and no doubt the white-armed goddess on the opposite bank was but a spectral creation of his brain: in another moment or two she would have vanished and taken to flight, for her far and foam-girt isle. He hardly cared even to look at her. She was not an effulgent and lustrous creature as a goddess should be; for the grey dimness of the dawn was still around her; she was a mere ghost, ethereal and visionary; he had been reading the night before some stories out of the Greek mythology; and he was of an imaginative turn of mind.

Then all of a sudden a spasm of horror shot to his heart. Why, this was no fantastic illusion whatever; he knew who it was, and why she was there; it was Eelin Macdonald, escaped from control, come down to make one more mad effort to swim the Devil's Kirn. In consternation he saw her take off her slippers at the end of the shingle; he saw her wade in through the shallows to the deeper water; he saw the fragile body throw itself against the heavy current; and in an agony of helplessness he could only wait and watch, not knowing whither she might be carried. But he had quickly taken off his coat and flung it on the grass behind him: so far he was prepared for anything that might happen. By this time there were nurses and servants rushing down the distant bank—calling, and shrieking, and wringing their hands: little attention did he pay to them.

It was piteous to see the frail white human creature

contending with the ebon-black implacable stream; and of course the result was inevitable; with her spent strength she could make no headway at all; certainly she fought and fought, for she had the courage of the Kinvaig Macdonalds in her veins, and perhaps the fever lent her some access of wild effort. The end speedily came. She was swept down like some white rose-leaf on the surface of the water; the Devil's Kirn had got its grip of her; and hither and thither she was being whirled—until Archie Gilchrist saw his chance, and jumped in. He was a good swimmer, the swinging current notwithstanding. He seized hold of her—he bore her to the bank—he carried her to the slope where his coat was lying—in another moment she was wrapped up in that uncouth garment, and he had placed her arms around his neck, and he had clasped her firmly to him, as he set out for the house. He went in the direction of the upper suspension-bridge; he vaguely knew that the shrieking women were running across, with blankets and such things.

And then she said to him, in a panting kind of way—

"Oh, Somerled—my love! my dear love!—have you come for me at last? Ah, why did you never speak? I guessed, you know—oh, yes, I guessed—and when you gave me the thousand pounds for the Macdonalds of Glengarva, my mother said you were either mad or madly in love—and if you were in love it was with me—and I guessed that too, though I would not let on. And as for me—my heart was yours from the moment I saw your strong, earnest eyes. But then, you see, I was promised; and I could not break my promise; and

you were proud, and you held aloof, and would not say a word—ah, well, that is the bitterness of life——"

The mental torture was more than man could bear; he staggered towards the nearest bench, and sate down there, holding her closer to him, and trying to soothe her fevered imagination. Then the terrified nurse came flying, with rugs and blankets; and these she quickly wound round the trembling fugitive, who had some dim notion of what was going on. Nay, she tried to express her thanks, in a merry kind of way.

"Jeanie's a' weet, puir body," said she. "Do you know the old version, nurse? But it's not with 'coming through the rye.' I think I must have been in the river —perhaps—perhaps—and it is so cold this morning—and I have given you so much trouble—I ask for your pardon——"

Gilchrist had now got up again, with his precious charge folded to him closer than ever.

"Mr. Gilchrist," said the nurse, anxiously, "won't you let me carry her?"

"No, by God," said he, "nobody shall carry her but myself." His face was as white as death; and his arms trembled; but he had great physical strength; and there was not much fear for the invalid. The worst of it was that this arrangement enabled him—compelled him, rather—to hear her whispered confidences—confidences that tore his soul; for it was impossible to doubt that all through these wandering phrases the girl was revealing the secret of her life.

"You see, Somerled—oh, my darling!—my love with the strong eyes!—that you should have come back to me!—well, I used to go up to the Castle hill—and I

used to look towards Ben Wyvis—and—and—think about Alt-na-Traive; and sometimes Tannahill's verse would come into my head; 'Och hey! Johnnie lad, Ye're ne sae kind's ye should hae been'—and then I thought that was most unworthy—I—I admired you all the more for your pride and silence; because—because you knew that I had given my promise—didn't you? Ah, but never a word—never a word from Alt-na-Traive—and the long distance—and I am not complaining—oh no, I am not complaining—I would rather ask for pardon—from anyone I have done wrong to——"

She sobbed a little; his heart heard her sobs. And here was her mother, at the end of the small suspension-bridge. The poor woman could hardly speak. It was her affrighted vision that made its mute enquiry. And then she followed her daughter—she the first, of course—though she could scarce put one foot before the other. With tremulous and useless fingers she would endeavour to draw the blanket somewhat closer round Eelin's neck; or with her handkerchief she would try to wipe away a few drops of water from the splendid blue-black hair; she was entirely distraught; she did not know what she was doing; her eyes were blind.

It was a long and roundabout way they had to come; and again and again they offered him help; but the white-faced man would have none of it. And every word she spoke, in that hushed, appealing voice, was like a dagger.

"Oh, my love, my love," she whispered, "you have come for me at last, and all I wish for is to lie in your arms for ever and ever—even in the grave. The 'Braes of Glenbraon' were never for you and me; they were

for happy people; at least they were happy for a time—oh, I hope so—I hope so—even if there was a broken heart at the end; but for you and me it's more like Kirkconnel—you remember what he said after his sweetheart was shot—his prayer was 'And I in Eelin's arms lying, on fair Kirkconnel lea.' That was in the grave, you know. Well, why not? Tell me, Somerled of the brave eyes, are you listening—are you listening to me?"

"Oh, yes, indeed," he answered, and he hoped his voice would not undeceive her. "We shall soon be at the house now, and you'll be put to bed, and get warm."

She thanked him over and over again; and begged pardon for the trouble she was causing; nay, in a pitiful sort of fashion she seemed to think it was her duty, in return for this kindness, to entertain him.

"You know, dearest heart, they used to laugh at me," she said, with a fine pretence of cheerfulness. "Ah, yes, they did. They used to say that none of mankind was good enough for me—because—because—well, no man has ever kissed me, and that is the truth. And Lily Neile she would often sing 'There was anes a May—and she lo'ed na men—she—she biggit her bonnie bower—down i' yon glen'—I have forgotten the rest. But I never complained of their laughing—no, no: I waited to find my lord and master—and when I saw you and recognised you—I said to myself 'Well, perhaps he will allow me to go into the fields to glean a little, and I will be his handmaiden, if I should find favour in the sight of my lord.' And you commanded them to let fall some of the handfuls—ah, did you not!—did you not!—when I was doing small things here and there for Kinvaig and Glengarva. Thy handmaiden—thy hand-

maiden—ah, yes, willingly—willingly—but the fields and the sheaves were so far away—when I went on to the Castle hill I could not see them because of Ben Wyvis. Yes, and when I was seated on one of the benches, an old gentleman came up and said 'Tell me, young lady, why are you crying so?' I pretended I was not crying at all—that the distance to Ben Wyvis strained the eyesight; and when he went away I fell to crying again—but what was the use—what was the use—the sheaves were so distant—and the handmaiden—not able—not able to bow down before her lord—"

And yet again she tried to talk more cheerfully—in those hushed, hurried sentences—

"Gilchrist has been so kind to me—so kind—so kind and considerate. I think I must ask for his pardon. I was never to him what a sweetheart should be—I suppose not—according to the old songs—and he never once remonstrated—well, you see, we were so much engaged in our small literary plans and schemes—that was a kind of safeguard, no doubt. But—but—but when my lord of the strong eyes has come for his handmaiden, Gilchrist will set me free from the literary partnership—ah! I know him—I know him—all the way through it has been whatever I might wish—and some day—I will learn how to thank him."

He managed to get the swathed figure over or through the turnstile; and she still murmuring to him. They were now close by Glengarva House. The weeping women had rushed forward to have the gate wide open.

"And Somerled—oh, my own, my own!" she said. "You know we must try to do something for Archie Gilchrist when he goes away to London to fight the great

fight. Ay, and he will not fail. He will not fail. I know him. If all the Assassins' Club were confronting him, breast to breast, his right arm would send the whole crew of backbiters swinging to the wall. And we shall hear of him—and read of him—oh, it is such a wonderful thing to have won the praise of the world—and the affection of so many people—in different countries—all over the globe to have friends and well-wishers who are grateful to you—oh, yes, a marvellous thing—yes, and so few attain that—but I know he will—he will—he has the strength—he has the width of outlook—oh, yes—he will—he will—win to it. Do you know, Somerled, that he once called me the '*belle dame sans merci*'—and I I was to go 'singing on my way.' Ah, but I was never one of that kind. And I would have kept my promise —only—only—that my head has not been so well lately; and if you see Gilchrist, will you tell him that I ask his pardon; whatever happens, he is the one to forgive me, sure I am of that—"

He was taking her up the gravelled pathway, and she seemed to have some confused idea that she was nearing home.

"Somerled—Somerled," she moaned, "I am wishing to please you—but my voice is not what it was—something on the harp I could play for you, if you like the old airs. Not the 'Braes of Glenbraon'—oh, no, not the 'Braes of Glenbraon'—for there was unhappiness there —oh, my heart is like to break when I hear the 'Braes of Glenbraon'—I know all the Orain na'h-Albainn—and anyone that would please you—for I am sorry to be giving you so much trouble—I ask for your pardon—I ask for your pardon——"

He carried her to her room, and left the womenfolk to attend to her; then he went down into the hall, and took a chair there: his face was like the face of a dead man. Nor did they altogether neglect him. After a short while Jane the parlourmaid came running to ask whether he would not have some tea, or hot soup, or brandy; but he only said "No, thank-you—no, thank-you" to these friendly suggestions. And Morag the Mull lass—her face "sair begrutten"—not knowing what else she could do, brought cloths to wipe away the water from his ankles and feet.

"Morag, my dear," he said to her in Gaelic, "it is kind of you, but it is not necessary; could you not be of some service upstairs?"

And then the doctor arrived, and, with a curt nod of recognition, passed Gilchrist and went on: the case was too urgent to permit of formalities. The shivering, white-faced young man got up and began to interest himself with the stags' horns ranged along the wall. Oh, yes, there were some good heads—some fine royals, with admirable cups—only that his eye did not seem to convey any permanent impression to his brain. Undoubtedly, they were excellent heads, he strove to convince himself —brow, bay, and tray, all admirable—and likewise there were strange monstrosities too, quite worthy of inspection; and he tried to observe them, by way of passing the time; and he thought he saw them—but all the while his heart was listening for the first footfall on the carpet of the stairway.

"My good friend," said the doctor, when he came down, "you ought not to be here at all. You ought to be in bed. You are shaking as if with the palsy. No

wonder, perhaps. But come away, I will drive you home——"

"The news, Doctor, the news—what do you think?" the younger man exclaimed.

He was hustled into the brougham, and the doctor followed.

"You'll have to get home at once, and drink some hot spirits and go to bed—for I don't want another patient on my hands just at present—"

"But—but—your opinion—what do you think of her?" he asked, in a frenzied fashion, as they drove off: he paid little attention to his own shiverings and shakings.

"Oh, well," said the doctor, cautiously, "such a shock to the system, in the middle of a high fever, is serious enough. Yes. Undoubtedly. Very serious. Very bad. But who knows?—she has youth and strong health on her side; never any young lady I have known was stronger in her health than Miss Eelin Macdonald: yes, yes, I have been privileged to look on her swimming—in heavy water, too; and I've seen her rowing—the ease and grace of the stroke just admirable; and I've seen her throw a salmon-line—and who is there, man or woman, who can throw a better?—and all these things help—they help to build up a constitution; and she has all along been as strong as a young colt—and she may pull through anything. But it is you I have to deal with at present; and you are going home—and going to bed."

Archie Gilchrist went home; but he did not go to bed; when he had changed his clothes, he made straight for the Office of the Invernish *Observer*.

"Grieve," said he, to the sub-editor, "will you look after things for the next day or two? I may not be back—"

"But what's the matter?" said Grieve. "You look very ill!"

"Ah, that's nothing—that's nothing," he said. "If you would open letters and attend to affairs generally for a day or so—I am leaving by the middle-day train for Lairg; and the drive to Alt-na-Traive is long—"

"But, Gilchrist, you don't seem fit to travel anywhere!" his comrade remonstrated.

"Oh, yes, I can manage," he said. "I can manage. I am not made of sugar and salt. And you'll look after everything while I am away, won't you; and if there's any serious news you might telegraph to Alt-na-Traive—only—only I shall be back soon."

CHAPTER XXV.

TWO LOVERS.

THE young editor of the Invernish *Observer* had become quite a known personage in the town; the railway porters touched their caps to him; the station-master, obliging as ever, hurried to see if he could find a compartment for him; and so he set forth. Little indeed of that journey could he afterwards recall. He must have looked out on the lapping waters of the Cromarty Firth—and on the wider sea-range up Dornoch way—and on the wooded heights by the Kyle of Sutherland; he must have seen them, no doubt; and yet without seeing them. He had come upon the strangest errand ever undertaken by mortal man. He could not shape his thoughts about it; it was too difficult. Besides that, his brain was tor-

tured by a recurrent phrase: "I ask for your pardon—I ask for your pardon." That she—she—the beautiful clear-souled one—that she should be piteously asking pardon of all mankind—she who had never a thought of harm for any human creature, but quite the other way: she who wished to do well to everyone—who was benignant, and generous, and kind to all around her—but especially if you happened to be poor—or abashed—or unfitted for her notice: this was a bewildering thing. The proud and radiant young lass: why should she have become so humble: why should she beg for forgiveness from all the world? Well, it was not much of that journey that in after days Archie Gilchrist could bring back to his mind.

The evenings were drawing in now; he resolved to pass the night at Lairg, instead of driving on through the dark to Alt-na-Traive; indeed, he was not in a hurry; he knew he had to formulate certain things in his own mind before the object of his mission could be accomplished; and a few sleepless hours would serve. At dinner, in the coffee-room, he was so fortunate as to make the acquaintance of two clergymen who proved to be of a most genial temperament; they beguiled the solitude (for they and he were the only guests, the tourist season being quite over), they beguiled their enforced solitude with many merry tales and recitals of extraordinary experiences, chiefly connected with trolling for salmo ferox; nor did they monotonously confine themselves to fishing; nor were they very straitlaced about their japes; for example, when one of them told the story of a Scotch elder who said to his Minister: "No, no, Minister, ye needna warn me against the sin o'

sweerin'; it's a bad thing, sweerin; I dinna sweer; I wouldna sweer; but sometimes I've been damned near it"—well, Gilchrist could only piously hope that the fable was new—perhaps it was even true. Then, when the brothers of the church had retired to the smoking-room, he went outside. There was a full moon, clear in the cloudless heavens; but also there were intervening trees, stirred by a light northerly wind; so that the swaying branches cut the luminous circle into multitudinous jagged and dazzling stars and planets that shone and scintillated suddenly here and there through the thick dark foliage. He would have liked Wild Eelin to have described this thing, in one of her discursive, frolicsome, but minutely observant papers.

Then he walked down to the side of the lake. It was a great breadth of mystic grey, with successive promontories, black as jet, appearing at receding distances; until, in the extreme west, the moonlight caught a bay of calm, and there was a bold scimetar-sweep of silver under the larch-woods and the spectral hills. If only Eelin could have seen it, to write about it, and make it for ever vivid!

He walked along to the weir, and stood and listened to the half-hushed hurrying voice, and he tried to make out if this or that one of Eelin's songs—any one of them—brave and valiant, or pitiful with the misery of bygone unhappy folk—could be heard through the confused nocturnal accompaniment. He stood and listened and listened, and tried to detect the sound of her voice, as often he had heard it: was it "Logie o' Buchan, O Logie the laird, they hae taen awa Jamie that delved in the yaird"—or was it "The auld Stuarts back again"—or

was it something about "Glenlin, and Dunoon, and Loch Striven?" For she had become afraid of "The Braes of Glenbraon"—and "Kirkconnel Lea" was too suggestive of the grave. Ah, it was not "And ye'll tak the high road, and I'll tak the laigh, and I'll be in Scotland before ye, But me and my true love will never meet again—" He stood and listened and tried to make out the faint echo of Eelin's voice; but he quite failed. It was the water-kelpie's voice that answered him: and that only said "Eelin"—and "Eelin"—and "Eelin" in tones of unutterable sadness and farewell. For indeed his senses had got somewhat distracted; it was the one love of his life he was thinking of—the impetuous, splendid young creature that for awhile he somehow seemed to have gained for himself—and to-morrow he was going to give her away to another man.

Next morning broke fine and still, with hoar-frost; that is to say, under the long-stretching shadows of the shrubs the grass was of a cold grey, but out in the open, where the sunlight fell, it was of a warm golden-green, the innumerable tiny spears glittering with diamonds of orange and dancing blue. He had ordered a waggonette to be waiting for him; when he went to the hotel-door he did not notice that for a second the driver glanced at him, or rather at his costume, in an odd sort of way. He took his place, and told the man to go on.

"It's rather cold this morning," he said, in a perfunctory fashion.

"Ay, sir, it is that," replied the driver, "and it will be colder when we get up to Crask, for the wind's off the hills."

And so they left the pleasant neighbourhood of Loch

Shin—with its islands, and yellow promontories and its plantations all basking in the sun, and by-and-by they emerged upon the vast and bare moorland, that now had a touch of snow on it. Nay, as they got up to the higher altitudes, the great expanse became of a solid white—a white as solid as the shoulders of Ben Armin, that seemed to reign over this desolate and silent realm. Here and there a robust clump of heather had shaken itself free, and stood black-brown on the edge of a knoll; but small individual features of that kind did not interfere with the general character of the landscape, that seemed to have hushed itself to sleep, under a spotless shroud. There was not the whir of a bird's wing in all the voiceless waste.

And so the horses toiled on, up the lonely Strath Terry, with Ben Clebrig showing himself against the northern skies; and Gilchrist was lost in sombre meditation, until a remark from the driver startled him out of his reverie.

"They're coming, sir," the man said.

"Who are coming?"

"The funeral."

He looked along the road, or the faint indications of a road, and far away he saw a small black procession—the tiniest black dot it was—coming into the spacious, white, solitary world.

"But whose funeral?" he asked again.

"Mr. Macdonald, that was at Alt-na-Traive," the man answered, in obvious astonishment. "The old gentleman—was you not hearing of it, sir?"

"Why did they not tell me at Lairg?" Gilchrist demanded.

"We thought it was for the funeral you came through, sir; and no one would be liking to speak to you about it. Will I go off the road?"—for Highlanders do not care to meet a funeral.

"No, no," Gilchrist responded, sharply. "Keep to the road; but when the funeral comes up, then you can give them plenty of room to go by; and if Mr. Somerled Macdonald wishes to speak to me, he can either do that or pass on, just what he chooses."

The tiny black procession coming into the white moorland consisted merely of the hearse and one mourning carriage, and the mourning carriage had but one occupant. When he saw that this was Archie Gilchrist whom he had encountered, Somerled Macdonald ordered the drivers to stop, and Gilchrist got down and went across.

"This is very sad—and sudden," he said.

"Well, not so sudden," Somerled answered. "I had been warned by the doctor. And not so sad either. He died full of years and honour, and the greatest honour conferred upon him was the kindness of the ladies of Kinvaig. He had no expectation of any such thing when we came to this country—oh, no, none—for he was not a presuming man—and their reception of him, and their continued friendliness towards him—became the crowning joy of his life. Well, both mother and daughter will find that he has not been ungrateful. Miss Eelin will find she has not been forgotten. But I am detaining you, and it is cold up here. You are going on to Alt-na-Traive?"

"No," Gilchrist answered, in great embarrassment.

"My mission was to see you—but in these circumstances——"

"How can anything be altered?" Somerled Macdonald said, in his direct fashion. "If you are going back to Lairg, take a seat in this carriage, and let your waggonette follow. Then you can tell me at your leisure."

Gilchrist accepted this suggestion—and yet with some apology.

"If I had known," he said, as they continued on their way, "I should have come in proper clothes. But there was no intimation of any kind—"

"No," said his companion, "I will arrange about the newspaper announcements when I get to Invernish: it will be more certain there than writing from a remote hamlet like Alt-na-Traive. Still, I wonder you have not heard—for I sent a note to Glengarva House—"

"At Glengarva House," Gilchrist said, slowly, "I do not think they are opening letters just now."

The strong, refined features of the other man grew suddenly ashen-grey.

"What is that you mean?" he said at once.

And then Gilchrist told him all the tale that he had in a kind of way prepared and arranged in sequence; and he went on to defend his own position; and why he had come on this journey—not knowing of the funeral. For awhile Somerled Macdonald sate silent. The clear, brown, contemplative eyes looked troubled: there was no other sign. At length he said—

"What the doctor told you about her splendid constitution is everything; clearly that is what he relies upon; and when she has pulled through, and become her natural self again, it will be time enough to talk about me. No,

there will be no talk about me. People in delirium take wild fancies; and all these rambling references to the Castle hill, and Ben Wyvis, mean—just nothing at all."

Gilchrist shook his head.

"You may think what you like," he said, "but I know. The story she told me—mistaking me for you—was too consecutive. The secret she had kept hidden was no longer a secret, when she thought she was talking to you."

And then after awhile Somerled Macdonald said—

"Why did you come to tell me all this—you who are engaged to be married to her?"

"I could have concealed it, no doubt," Gilchrist answered, calmly. "And probably, when the fever goes, she may have forgotten that she made these revelations. And she would keep her promise to me: I am certain of that; yes, I am certain of that. But then I should be a dishonoured man. And it is not for Eelin Macdonald to pass her life with a dishonoured man."

"You are making a great sacrifice," said the other, absently. "Only—only—how can one trust to what is said in delirium?"

"I do not ask you," Gilchrist answered. "But when she is quite out of this illness, you must go to her, and you must tell her from me that she is free—yes, yes, quite free to choose wherever her wish may fall—and then you may believe the story she confided to me when I was carrying her from the Islands to Glengarva House. And she will have no difficulty in understanding why you should present yourself before her. Well she knew what the thousand pounds meant."

"The thousand pounds!" said Somerled Macdonald.

"The thousand pounds! When I would have the skin of both my hands flayed to make a lacing-string for her shoe!"

And so they went on through the wide, white, silent wilderness until they reached Lairg station, where the coffin was transferred, while they passed on to one of the usual compartments. They were pretending to talk about ordinary things—about the green of the firs showing through the snow—about the removal of the nets from the Kyle of Sutherland—about the letting of Langwell Lodge—and so forth; but perhaps their thoughts were elsewhere. Archie Gilchrist, for example, was conscious that in due time they would get down to Dingwall; and he knew of an old silver-haired dame there who now would probably never see Eelin Macdonald, and never understand how near he had been to winning for himself the proud-eyed, proud-stepping daughter of the House of Kinvaig.

When they arrived at Invernish there was another necessarily tedious transference of the coffin, and Archie Gilchrist would have had his companion drive out with him to hear the latest tidings of the poor invalid. But Macdonald declined.

"No," he said, "until I have seen my father laid in that small churchyard in Glengarva, I must do nothing else. And indeed," he added, with some delicacy, "I was wondering whether you might not have gone on with me——"

"And I was thinking of it, too," said Gilchrist, "for I know it is just what Eelin herself would wish. Only, I must get news of her; and I will jump into a cab, and see if I can intercept the doctor anywhere; and then I

will go home for a couple of seconds, to get into proper clothes; and I shall be back here before you are ready to start. And meanwhile you must get something to eat: it's a long way to Glengarva; and there is the Station Hotel—if you go into the coffee-room, I shall join you in a few minutes—"

In a very short time he was back; the subdued gladness of his face was its own report. Somerled Macdonald held out his hand, and it was grasped.

"It is well," Somerled said (with the grave eyes burning), "I can see it is well."

"Yes, yes," said the other, "the news is good. But I could not find the doctor; I chanced to come across the night-nurse, who was out for her usual walk; and she thought that Miss Eelin was going on first-rate, in spite of the tremendous trial. Oh, yes, her tone was confident, if it was cautious; and I think that some of us may yet hear Eelin Macdonald sing 'The Braes of Glenbraon'—no, no, not that one—she seemed to have a fear of that one—but any of her other songs—'O heard ye yon pibroch'—or 'Sweet sir, for your courtesie'—"

He turned away, and looked round the big dining-hall. He professed to be interested in the question as to whether the stags' antlers displayed along the cornice were real or manufactured. And when he came back to the small table that Somerled Macdonald had engaged, he asked whether the latest telegrams had come in about the Forfarshire election. Macdonald's firm eyes were not to be deceived. He said to himself "Here is a man whose heart is broken, by the bitter stroke of fate; and in all God's universe what atonement can be made to

him for that? No, nor may one even offer a furtive word of sympathy!"

Thereafter they resumed their journey; and as their route lay along the east bank of the river, they came within sight of the Islands, and, on the opposite side of the stream, the red house with its black araucaria, its cedars, and its yellowed elms and limes. The sunlight was on the place, and all seemed happy and quiet.

"Do you see that open gate?" said Gilchrist—for the eyes of both men were fixed on the same spot.

"I know it."

"Ah, but some day the drive will not be so empty as it is now. You will find Eelin Macdonald come swinging along, with the joy of youth in her free way of walking, and the joy of youth in her greeting to this one and that. Look—they have left the gate open! Do you understand what that is for? Why, when she comes out for her first stroll, she will not be impeded! And of course Jane will be there, when the carriage comes out from the town; and Morag will have plenty of rugs; and I shouldn't wonder, when the landau goes by, if General Mallock were to hurry down to the front, to wave a glad congratulation to her. I can make out the whole picture; and I don't wonder that the servants, come running down to the corner of the pathway, to see her off, should be crying with delight; for Miss Eelin had a trick of making many friends, both gentle and simple; and when she first goes into Invernish, after her illness, the word will be passed round, and many a one will come out to shake hands with her and say something kind to her. Oh, yes, she had the way of making friends—"

"Gilchrist," said his companion, not without a certain

anxiety, "do you know you have wrought yourself into a terrible pitch of excitement; and unless you quiet down, something may happen? The last news is good news: what more could you wish for? Now tell me how it was you chanced to be out here so early, the morning she dashed herself into the river?"

"Oh, well," said Archie Gilchrist—and the question did in a measure recall him to his senses—though these were disturbed enough—"I generally come out here about daybreak; the place is so quiet; and I bring my books and papers with me, and get on a little bit with my work. And indeed I was so much engaged with these things that when I saw her come down to the edge of the river, at that time of the morning, I thought it was merely some phantasm of the brain—a ghost—a white ghost—which I could get rid of by shutting my eyes. But when she splashed into the stream, then I knew. It has always been her ambition to swim through the Devil's Kirn up to the weir; and there were the women come shrieking down from the house; and I knew. Yes, I knew. And I knew what the end must be; and I waited on the bank until the swing of the current carried her down, and then I went in and got hold of her."

"Otherwise she would have been drowned?" said his neighbour, with downcast eyes.

"Her strength was far spent," was the answer.

And then the straightforward eyes looked up again.

"You love this girl quite to distraction," said Somerled Macdonald. "And she has promised to marry you. And you have just saved her life. Yet you seem to suggest that I should take her away from you, on account of a

few words spoken in delirium. My friend, even if there were any such impossible possibility—I am not a coward hound."

CHAPTER XXVI.

"TO EVERY MAID HER LOVER."

THAT night they spent at Bridge of Kinvaig inn; the bullet-heads were no longer in possession; the remote little hostelry was quite quiet. And somehow, as the two men were seated in front of the fire, the talk always drifted back to Eelin Macdonald—Wild Eelin—Eelin with the eyes like the sea-wave, as her Highland friends called her; and Somerled seemed curious to know a little more of the literary side of her character, of which he had only heard vaguely.

"But that is just what I can tell you," Gilchrist responded, with something of eagerness. "Because she and I had been fighting each other, of course in the most goodnatured way, for a long while back, in the columns of the Invernish *Observer*. And she always got the best of it—always: she is so witty, and sarcastic, and flaunting: she doesn't play quite fair, you know; when you think you have got her in a corner, she simply laughs at you, and goes off like a butterfly. Well, as you may imagine, if it had not been for that newspaper interchange of banter, I should not have presumed to make the acquaintance of Miss Macdonald of Kinvaig; but there were one or two little incidents; and she is no respecter of persons; she is too happy in herself: she wishes well to everyone. And then, since I came to have a better knowledge of her, what has impressed me most is the extraordinary grasp and nimbleness of her

intellect—why, when you are labouring with problems, she flips in with a half-mocking suggestion, and the whole thing is clear. She is so alert, and audacious; and yet she is most distrustful about anything she herself writes. Why I have here at this moment a scrap of verse which she sent me for my opinion!—the opinion of an elephant on the song of a sky-lark!—"

He fumbled about among his papers until he came upon the scrap of MS.; and then he handed it over; and this was what his companion read—and re-read more than once:

Loud winds, low winds: to every maid her lover;
Where'er the sunlight shines, where'er the shadows hover;
But my dear love comes never, oh never, back to me,
Nor by the shore, nor by the hills, nor by the Northern Sea.

"Are you going to publish this?" he said, not lifting his eyes from the handwriting—which well he recognised.

"Oh, she may work it into something—who knows?" said the other. "She is clever enough."

"Because," said Somerled Macdonald, "whatever value that is to the newspaper, I will give you five hundred times the value, if I may keep this for my own."

"Five hundred times nothing is still nothing," said Gilchrist. "As it stands the little fragment is of no use at all. Take it—keep it."

"And about a copy?"

"Oh, I can remember well enough," Gilchrist made answer. "I can remember every word she ever wrote—that is, since I came to know who she was—who 'White Cockade' was—who had been jibing at me for so long a while; and of course a thickhead such as I am had no chance against her—not the least—with her

quick-wittedness, and her knowledge of foreign literature, and of foreign places, and her gay humour: why, she pinned one at every corner. Do you think I complain? No, I do not complain. It will be a proud day for me when I receive her next batch of MS., written in full exuberance of health; and she may trounce away at me as much as she chooses. There will be no complaining, that day!"

By-and-by Gilchrist resumed:

"Of course, Mr. Macdonald, it may be very insolent on my part to assume that I shall have any share in the editing: because when you, in your overwhelming generosity, handed me over the Invernish *Observer*, it was on a distinct understanding. It was to be a sort of dowry for Miss Eelin Macdonald. It was to give me a better position, so that I should not demean her in the eyes of her friends. Well, that is all past. And when you and I return to town, and when you present yourself before her, I know what will happen. And then I will surrender back to you the proprietorship and the editorship of the paper——"

The clear-brown eyes leapt out at him, in involuntary anger.

"Again must I ask you if you think I am a coward hound?" Somerled Macdonald demanded. "What I give, is given. It is no longer mine. Am I going to receive back a gift?"

"It was a gift, bestowed conditionally," the other suggested.

"I named no conditions: it is a gift," said Macdonald, with certain lines about his mouth that showed Gilchrist there was little use in further remonstrance: it was not

the first time he had discovered the strength of decision in this man—though, to be sure, he himself was not much deficient in firmness of will.

And again he said—

"You see, Mr. Macdonald, I always had a conviction that the small literary copartnership that existed between Miss Eelin and me would end in nothing else. It could not. It was not in the nature of things. And if I must suffer for my presumption, then I must suffer; but it was what I had foreseen. Yes, I dreaded it all the time. My fortune had gone too high. Yet she would have kept her promise: that I know. She had a wild imagining that I was to do great things in literature; and that my ambition was to be her pride. Well, my ambition—and I would give my life for it—is to see Eelin Macdonald once more strong enough to be out in the white boat and throwing a line over the Devil's Kirn."

"Ay, but you will see more than that," his companion said, calmly. "You will see her fishing the best pools on the Garva river, and herself the mistress and owner of every one of them. Does that surprise you? Well, hitherto it has only been a kind of dream; but sometimes dreams come true. And now I will tell you the story: it is better you should be prepared. When my father and I first went out to Glengarva House, the windows in the drawing-room had been left open, and in the garden there was a girl singing; and the tones of her voice went straight to my heart—so that—so that —but I cannot describe it: I suppose it happens to a man once in his life. And then she came into the room. Ah, but you know her; you have seen her in the radiance of her young enthusiasm and her wit and her

beauty, and her kindness and courtesy to every soul around her. Well, then, when my father and I set out for the town again, we went out by the well where the sweet water is—you know—and crossed over to the Islands—then I put my project before him. I said I was willing to begin life again as a poor man, if only I could buy back enough of the Garva strath to re-establish the Kinvaig family in the old home of their race. He laughed. He said I was mad. He said I had been bewildered by the eyes of a girl; and that I wanted to win her favour that way. It was not so. If my original scheme had been carried out, no human being would ever have known who had re-instated the Macdonalds of Kinvaig in their ancient possessions—because—because—well, I should have left the country. My father was against the plan at first. He said it was a mere fantasy. But all the same it dwelt in his mind; he kept talking and talking about it when we were up at Alt-na-Traive; and I know a blind man can see a lot, when he is thinking. And at last—we were along at Morten's Bay, I remember, but not occupied much with the fishing—for the weather was so still and clear—at last he said 'Somerled, when we get back to the inn, you must sit down and write at once to Gibson and Galbraith, and ask them if they can discreetly find out something about Glengarva—that is to say, what is the length of Lord Mountmahon's lease, and whether Sir Charles Orme would be prepared to sell, supposing the tenancy were to lapse, and what would be the probable cost of the Kinvaig property, including the house, and the fishing rights all the way down.' He spoke in an off-hand kind of way; but I knew he had been thinking.

Yes, he had been thinking, to some purpose, as the ladies at Glengarva House will discover ere long. For the way is pretty clear now. The Mountmahon scum have been washed out of the place. And Sir Charles Orme is not so prosperous that he is likely to refuse a good offer. He will come to terms. It can be managed, I think; but—but—if only my father could have lived to know that the Macdonalds of Kinvaig were established in the old home of the name! And there's many a one out there in Canada will hear and rejoice; and the news will spread; and many is the bonfire that will be lit when the transaction is completed, and the old family restored. My father used to talk of it as a dream and a fantasy; but it is his money that is going to do it—"

"And he has not left his money to you?" said Gilchrist, with a start.

"Man alive, what do you take me for?" the other retorted. "I would rather earn my weekly wage as a plate-layer on the Canadian Pacific Road than seek to interfere with such a grand idea. Yes, there will be bonfires. The news will spread. I will take care of that. I will take care there are bonfires when the news is telegraphed over that the Macdonalds of Kinvaig are going back to the old home of the race."

Gilchrist had never seen this man, usually self-repressed and silent, so excited—though he strove to conceal his excitement. His hands were clenched, that they might not betray any trembling.

"I should not wonder," he continued, "if Miss Eelin made a little speech, from the doorway of the house; she is bright enough for that; she is bright enough for anything: and I will have it telegraphed over, and

published in all the Canadian papers. I should like to have a picture of that. The old people will be crying. Angus the water-bailiff will not be far away. The children will be nearest the door, and perhaps they may have a few bunches of flowers to offer. And when Miss Eelin comes out to shake hands with everyone, young and old, I do not know whether she will be laughing or crying—perhaps both—but she will have a good deal of Gaelic to talk that day, because many of the people will have come in from the glens, and Gaelic is more expressive. My poor father used to picture all this scene, behind his blind eyes. He would speak of it in the evenings. And mostly the o'er-come was 'Where can I get a piper able enough to compose for me a march "The Kinvaig Macdonalds back again"—for that must be played when the Bean-an-Tighearn and her daughter arrive at the old family home.'"

Then Macdonald got some stiffer control over himself; and he said—

"There's another side to the scheme. You know that all the West Highlanders who go abroad do not prove good colonists; they have not been educated up to scientific agriculture; they have not much money amongst them; and incessantly and longingly they are looking back to the old country of the brae-sides and the lochs. Very well. My father has set aside a sum so that any of the Ontario Kinvaig people who have not been very fortunate, and who want to get back to the old home, shall be provided with a free passage; and a further provision is that the ladies of Kinvaig—at their convenience, of course—not disturbing them in any way—will out of the same fund secure for these people some

little croft or steading, or perhaps some farm work, along the strath. Now, do you not think that is an undertaking that Eelin Macdonald will delight in?—because she has always been so benevolent; and she knows the Gaelic; and never was a Queen in any land thought of as she is thought of by the Kinvaig Macdonalds. And I must have a picture of that—there are plenty of artists always painting about the Highlands—and he must make a good composition of it, you know—the girl coming out to the doorstep of the house—in the sunlight—and smiling and shaking hands with this one and that, while the piper is standing by ready to play 'The Return of the Macdonalds of Kinvaig.' Do you think I am blethering?" he went on, with his lips full of determination. "But I am not. And what my father has failed to supply—if he has failed to supply anything—that I will supply—for I have a little money of my own—my father's will does not affect me much. And when the picture is painted, it must be sent over to Ontario; and there I will have it photographed, and the photograph enlarged, and any number of copies made, so that in every cottage or house, whosoever likes may have the scene of the 'Welcome Home'—the young girl the central figure—in the sunlight—and laughing—and shaking hands—her blue Tam o' Shanter on the black hair—and her gentle mother looking on in quiet delight—not interposing—no, no—rather admiring the appearance of her daughter as queen of the ceremony. Do you think I am blethering?" he repeated. "Why, man, I have two hands; I do not care what happens to me; I can earn my living!"

He was evidently labouring under great excitement,

in spite of his intention of self-control; and Archie Gilchrist said to him—

"But, Mr. Macdonald, you talk in such a strange way—you speak as if you were to be absent from all these great doings——"

"I?" responded his companion. "It is not for me to be there. There may be great doings, no doubt; and many of the old Highland families will send a representative; and perhaps the Queen will despatch a messenger, carrying congratulations to one that was her Maid of Honour in former days; but I—what should I be doing there? Money is a vulgar thing. It gives you no claim. It may set the machinery going; but the unseen person should be down in the stoke-hole. No, my friend; to-morrow morning, when I have seen my poor old father laid in his last resting-place—and I know it was an honour he coveted—oh, yes, he was not a self-asserting man—far from that—but there was one honour he coveted, that his bones should lie in the old churchyard of Kinvaig: and that has been all arranged; and when the brief ceremony is over, well, then, I can drive you down to Invergarva, but after that you must make your home, for I am bound for Liverpool, and then away to Quebec."

Gilchrist's lips grew rather white.

"And that is what you shall not do," said he. "Once or twice you have asked me whether you were a craven hound. Well, I say you are, if you do not come with me to Glengarva House, and see Eelin Macdonald face to face, and demand of her if my story is true or false."

For a long while Somerled Macdonald remained silent. At last he said—

"It is not a pleasant ordeal for any man to encounter. If she were to say to me: 'You take advantage of a few words spoken in fever; and you betray this confidence; and what are you but a treacherous friend?' Oh, I can see the great eyes glowing with indignation! It is not an easy ordeal for any man to encounter."

"Ah, but I know," Gilchrist answered him. "And as for the betrayal of confidence, well, then, I was the betrayer. But I could not live all my life dishonoured. Yes, yes, I am aware that Eelin Macdonald would have kept her promise to me; I am aware of that; she is too proud-spirited for anything else. But you are coming with me into Invernish; and you are going to tell her she is free; and then whatever happens—happens; only I shall not have been dishonoured, and, I tell you again, it is not for Eelin Macdonald of Kinvaig to marry a dishonoured man."

CHAPTER XXVII.

FAREWELL.

It was on a brilliant and cheerful and shining day that these two drove along towards Invernish. And all their talk—now that poor Allan Macdonald had been laid to his rest—was chiefly of a practical turn, concerned, indeed, with the great project of having the Macdonalds of Kinvaig restored to their ancestral home. A brilliant day, indeed: the yellowed branches of the elms and the limes burned strong against the turquoise sky; the river went shivering down in silver; the far

heights of Ben Wyvis, when they came in sight, were of a soft azure and clear to the top.

But at a turn of the road, as they were getting down towards the Islands, Somerled Macdonald all of a sudden put his hands before his face, and tried to conceal that he had burst into a fit of crying and sobbing.

"But what is it—what is it?" Gilchrist exclaimed in alarm.

"Oh, my God, don't you see?" the other managed to answer him. "All the blinds in Glengarva House are down—at midday."

Gilchrist called on the driver to stop.

"I must have more certain news—there may be some mistake—I will not detain you but for a few moments."

He leapt down from the waggonette, flung his coat and cap on the bank, and slipped into the black-brown water, just above the Devil's Kirn. He was an excellent swimmer, and the river was low. Soon he was across to the shallows; and when he reached the dry shingle and the rowan bushes and the pathway, he ran with all his might of running until he disappeared within the gate. When, after a brief space, he came out again, the strength seemed to have gone from him: he walked like a broken man.

Of course he had to plunge into the river again, and fight his way over to the Devil's Kirn, but when he rejoined his companion, he had hardly a word to utter.

"Yes, it's true," he gasped. "And all the way over I was dreading. It happened this morning, I was told. And at the last she was quite conscious. And she contrived to pencil two messages—one for you and one for

me—and they were sent in to the *Observer* office. Let us get on," he said, as he pulled his coat round his shivering shoulders. "It will be the last sound of her voice."

In silence they drove in to Invernish, and in Somerled Macdonald's heart there was the agony of a refrain: it seemed to come from far away—and yet to have a piteous human cry in it—

Loud winds, low winds: to every maid her lover,
Where'er the sunlight shines, where'er the shadows hover;
But my dear love comes never, oh never, back to me,
Nor by the shore, nor by the hills, nor by the Northern Sea.

When they reached the town they made straight for the *Observer* office, and in the editorial room it was easy to pick out the two letters they sought, for Eelin generally used a peculiarly-shaped envelope, and besides they could readily recognise her handwriting, even in the frail and uncertain scrawl of the blue pencil. This was the one letter addressed to Somerled Macdonald.

"To him that was too proud, too honourable, to speak. But well I knew—ah, well I knew; and this is only a word of kindly good-bye. And I hope you will not quite forget

"EELIN."

And this was the other, addressed to Gilchrist.

"DEAR ARCHIE,

"You must now go and fight the great fight in London, and win a name for yourself, wherever English is known. And if I have done wrong to you at any